

**THE VOICES OF FIVE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN OF  
INCARCERATED PARENTS**

A Dissertation

by

ALTRICIA WILRETHA LARKE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,  
Co-Chair of Committee,  
Committee Members,

Head of Department,

Chance Lewis  
Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan  
Lynn Burlbaw  
Valerie Hill-Jackson  
Yeping Li

May 2014

Major: Curriculum and Instruction

Copyright 2014 AlTricia W. Larke

## **ABSTRACT**

On any given day, more than two million children are affected by the incarceration of their parents. A plethora of research has been gathered from the point of view of others involved in this American travesty, such as the imprisoned parents, the justice system, and caregivers; however, little research has been done from the view of the children themselves. With one in nine African American children having a parent in prison this study is timely; providing an in-depth view from the perspective of African American high school students who have experienced parental incarceration. Information was gathered revealing the perceptions of these students toward their education and school. The method of data collection was a case study. The results of this study provide insight for educators addressing the needs of the growing number of children of incarcerated parents in the classroom and school settings.

This study found African American adolescents of incarcerated parents face a multitude of risk factors that impinge upon their education such as, frequent mobility, emotional instability and missing their parents, all while keeping their parent's incarceration hidden. From their own voices, educators and administrators will know what the participants believe is needed to ensure future success. An important recommendation stemming from the study encourages educators to form positive relationships with these students. Many CIP's are invisible in schools. In order for educators to identify these students, they must develop a positive rapport and build

relationships. Therefore, strategies for building a positive rapport with students are included. These five students told their stories, now it is time for educators to listen, act and rise to the occasion.

## DEDICATION

*To those still silenced voices...to those who sit quietly in classrooms across this country...to my nieces and my nephew...to every child affected by incarceration.*

*In memory of my grandparents, Staretha Aaron Larke, Williard James, Harden James, Sr. and my great-grandmother, Emily “Mood” Gordon, on whose shoulders I will forever stand.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First giving honor to God who is the author and finisher of my faith, for through Him all things are possible and without Him nothing is possible. I would like to acknowledge my parents, Rev. Dr. Alvin Larke, Jr. and Dr. Patricia Ann James Larke, who have nurtured and sustained me from birth until this very day. Thank you so much for being who you are and whose you are. I love you both more than mere words could ever express. To my children, Alyssa Patrice Larke, Hazel Alford “Trey” DuRant, III and A’Nia Latrelle DuRant, thank you for your patience during this long and tedious process. Thank you all for sometimes parenting yourselves and each other as I worked full-time and completed this degree. A special thanks to my former spouse, Hazel A. DuRant, Jr. for stepping up to the plate and becoming the “primary caretaker” of our baby girl during the last two years of this endeavor. To the love of my life, Master Kaleb Alvin Larke, Nana loves you, Pumpkin Pie. And last but not certainly least, to my lover, my confidant, my friend, my husband, James Edward McCowan, Jr., thank you for the many meals, words of encouragement, patience, bubble baths and more. (Mama Jo and Pops, you raised him right!) I love you and I am eternally grateful for your support.

Thank you to my brother Aaron Reynard Larke and his children, Aysha, A’Kia, A’Mia, Aaliyah and J’Aaron. FAMILY, where would I be without you? Thank you to my brothers from another mother, Colton Tanner Kilpatrick, Dr. Rodrick O. Moore and of course a special thank you to my editor extraordinaire, Dr. Wash A. Jones. My

deepest appreciation and sincerest thanks goes to my BFF and Soror for life Tonyia F. Williams for her constant encouragement.

I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Valerie Hill-Jackson and Dr. Lynn Burlbaw, for not abandoning me during this longer than usual process. A special thanks to Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan for all the words of encouragement, constant edits and revisions, and the occasional fried chicken and Kool-aid (served on/in orange dishes of course). Thanks Dr. Chance Lewis for staying with me when you left the university. ☺ A special thanks to Kerri Smith. I am sure her name should be on a lot more of the degrees coming out of TLAC.

I would also like to thank my St. John AME Church family for your constant prayers and petitions on my behalf. A special thanks to the Women's Study Group, the Annie Estelle Missionary Society and Ms. Alveda Palmer, the midweek Prayer and Bible Study Group and the Women's Sunday School Class.

Finally thank you to those who I personally call friend, my teacher and administrator friends (who work tirelessly for our children) from Bryan, Houston, Rosenberg and Sugar Land...Shirley, Kelli, Donna, Janet, Felicia, Frank, Mark, Nicole, Omari, Samarity, April, Stacey, Jeff, Brad, Julia, Katrina, Claire, Whitney, Marc, Dawn, Kelly, Sonya, Jesus, Christy, and so many more...thanks for everything. I want to especially thank those who "really" run the schools across the nation...the Administrative Assistants & Custodians (especially Susan Jarvis WGAA). To Viretta

West and Patricia Crittendon, you two ladies are the finest administrators I have ever worked for.

And to anyone else...If you ever offered a kind word or a listening ear, I appreciate you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
My Story.....	7
Purpose and Scope of the Study .....	12
Research Questions .....	12
Theoretical Framework .....	13
Importance of Study .....	13
Definition of Terms .....	15
Assumptions and Limitations.....	17
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	18
Introduction .....	18
Theoretical Framework .....	19
Incarceration of Parents.....	23
Children's Issues .....	35
Supportive Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents.....	45
Education for Children of the Incarcerated .....	47
Teachers and the Children of Parental Offenders .....	50
Conclusion.....	53



CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY .....	54
Methodology .....	54
Research Design .....	56
Participants and Setting .....	56
Data Collection .....	58
Data Collection Protocols.....	60
Data Analyses.....	60
CHAPTER IV WHO ARE THEY .....	66
Meet the Participants .....	66
Their Stories .....	68
Cinnamon .....	69
Sparkle.....	73
Toughguy .....	77
Manchild.....	81
Slim .....	85
CHAPTER V WHAT DID THEY SAY? .....	89
MIA-Missing in Action.....	91
It's a Secret We Don't Tell .....	104
We're Doing Time Too .....	108
Just Keep Moving.....	113
Can You Feel Me?.....	118
You Still Want Me to Focus on School?.....	123
Summary of Results .....	129
CHAPTER VI SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .....	132
Relationship to the Theoretical Framework .....	133
Relationship to Previous Research .....	137
Discussion of Themes .....	143
Recommendations for Future Practices.....	150
Limitations For the Study and Further Research .....	161
Conclusion.....	163
REFERENCES .....	165
APPENDIX A .....	182

APPENDIX B .....	185
APPENDIX C .....	186
APPENDIX D .....	187

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1 Preliminary Coding Process .....	62
2 Missing Piece.....	63
3 Major Themes .....	90
4 The 5 S's.....	144
5 Building Student Rapport.....	157

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1 Demographic Data of Five African American Students .....	68
2 Future Plans After High School .....	129

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As incarceration of adults increases, so does the incarceration of parents. This chapter gives a general idea of factors that affect children whose parents are incarcerated. Included is a personal story of the impact these children have had on the author professionally and personally. A synopsis of purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, importance and scope of study also are included. This chapter ends with the definition of terms and assumptions and limitations of the study.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Incarceration is not a new phenomenon in modern society; however, in the last 25 years, incarceration rates have tripled to more than 2.3 million United States citizens behind bars (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008). The US now incarcerates more people than any country in the world, including China (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008). With this gargantuan increase in parental incarceration, this not only affects the prisoners, but families of those incarcerated as well. The majority of prisoners report having a minor child (under the age of 18) and more than 25% of those prisoners report having a child under the age of four (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Furthermore, the Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) found, “1 in every 28 children in America has a parent behind bars, up from 1 in 125 just 25 years ago (3.6%)” (p. 4). Putting this into perspective, in an average class of 30 pupils, at least one of these children will have a

parent in prison. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) also stated more than 1.2 million inmates, 54 % of the 2.3 million people behind bars are parents of children under age 18. This includes “more than 120,000 mothers and more than 1.1 million fathers” (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010, pg. 4).

The byproduct of incarceration is that children are sentenced to do time along with their parents. They often must cope with the harsh realities of the situation that the incarceration has created. When the parents who have been imprisoned or simply arrested and are under some type of criminal justice supervision, the number of children affected by this phenomenon skyrockets to, “More than seven million, or one in ten of the nation’s children, have a parent under criminal justice supervision – incarcerated, on probation or on parole” (Bernstein, 2005, p. 2). These children sit silently in classrooms across the United States, and by some accounts, are programmed for systemic failure until they are ultimately unleashed on society (Hartsfield, 2011).

A plethora of research has been conducted on prisoners and the effects of incarceration; however, only a modest amount of research has been done examining the impact on the children involved (Arditti, 2005; Arditti & Few, 2006; Arditti & McClintock, 2001; Bernstein, 2005; Gabel & Johnston, 1994; Hanlon, Blatchley, Bennett-Spears, O’Grady, Rose & Callaman, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Kjellstrand, 2009; Lee, 2005; Luke, 2002; Patillo, Weiman & Western, 2004). Recent research focused on the children, but usually from the perspective of the caretakers, the incarcerated family member or other adult family members (Carlson, 2010; Conn, 2011; Coulthard, 2010;

Diller, 2008; Gerhardt, 2012; Glass, 2011; Lazzari, 2012). In addition, Finley (2007) studied how incarceration affects marriage and the economy, while, McGruder (1995) explored how incarceration affects the availability of suitable mates.

Several factors affect children whose parents are incarcerated, such as changes in living arrangements, the child's adjustment to the new caregiver, the social stigma associated with incarceration, and certain other psychological stressors (Arditti, 2005; Arditti & Few, 2006; Arditti & McClintock, 2001; Bernstein, 2005; Gabel & Johnston, 1994; Hanlon, T. et al, 2005; Lee, 2005; Luke, 2002; Patillo et al., 2004). The relationship between the incarcerated parent and child suffers as well as the effect of visitation on the relationship (Johnston, 2012; Lazzari, 2012; Rivard, 2010; Sagar, 2011; Walker, 2011). However, one missing piece of critical research is how children perceive their education may be affected by their parent's incarceration. I believe that, as an educator, we need to know this information if, our meeting the needs of students we serve and ensuring their academic success remains the goal of education.

Studies (Bureau of Justice, 2008; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Pew Charitable Trust, 2008 & 2010) demonstrate how people of color are overrepresented in the United States penal system. Further, the Pew Charitable Trust (2008) study gave additional startling statistics, approximating that 1 in 100 adults are behind bars in the United States. Another study by the Pew Charitable Trust (2010) estimated that working aged African American males are incarcerated at a rate of 1 in 12, and, for Latino males, the numbers were estimated at 1 in 36 as compared to 1 in 87 for working aged White men.

More egregious are statistics declaring African American males in the age group of 20-34, the prime child rearing years, are incarcerated at a rate of one in nine (Pew Charitable Trust, 2008). In this same age group more African American men are behind bars (37%) than are employed (26%) (Pew Charitable Trust, 2010).

With the increase in incarceration rates of people of color, an increase also occurred in the incarceration of parents of children of color. As the number of imprisoned adults soared over the last three decades, the number of imprisoned parents increased as well (Bernstein, 2005; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Patillo, et al., 2004; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Between 1991 and 2007, the number of parents of minor children held in United States prisons increased 79% (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). “Fifty-four percent of inmates are parents with minor children (ages 0-17), including more than 120,000 mothers and 1.1 million fathers” (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010, p. 4).

Parent imprisonment varies by ethnicity. For example, African American children are seven and a half times more likely to have a parent in prison than whites, while Latino American children are two and a half times more likely to have a parent in prison than their white counterparts (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Other statistics estimate, of the 1.5 million children with a father in prison midyear 2007, nearly half (46%) were children of African American fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). More young African American men between the ages of 20 and 34 without a high school



diploma or GED are behind prison bars (37%) than are employed (26%) (Pew Trusts, 2010).

An emerging line of research gives voice to these marginalized children, but, with the profound impact on these children, we must learn more (Bernstein, 2005; Coulthard, 2010; Diller, 2008; Finlay, 2007; Hairston, 2007; Jenkins, 2010; Johnson, 2005; Kjellstrand, 2009; King-White, 2010; Posley, 2011). Parental incarceration places an undue burden on these children to cope with the emotional damage and the social stigma that arises from the incarceration (Bernstein, 2005; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Lee, 2005; Luke, 2002; Oseni, 2005; Vacca, 2008).

Sagar (2011) completed a study on children aged six to twelve whose parents currently were incarcerated, which focused on psychological problems by holding group therapy sessions. Sagar's study concluded that, after eight weeks of group therapy, there were no significant changes in the participants' psychological functioning such as levels of depression, anxiety and other-forgiveness (2011).

A few studies, such as Neal (2009) and Diller (2008), examine incarceration from an education perspective. Neal (2009) evaluated how incarceration affects elementary and middle school students by comparing the school performance of children with incarcerated parents to children in single parent households with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The study found a statistically significant difference in children of prisoners; children of incarcerated parents scored lower on tests than the students of single parents with similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Neal, 2009).

Diller (2008) interviewed adults whose parents were incarcerated while these adults were children and found these adults, while high school students had an overwhelming need to feel a sense of normalcy during their parents' incarceration. This study offered some information as to how teachers best could reach students from the participants' point of view. Nonetheless, neither of these studies was from the particular viewpoint of African American students currently enrolled in high school, with parents currently incarcerated.

As these children begin their journey through the education process, educators and school leaders first must begin to connect and understand, then implement a plan to address their unique circumstances. The parents made choices that harm the welfare of their children and cannot offer solutions to assist these children as they navigate the landmines within the education system created by their parents' incarceration. We, as educators and school leaders, must bridge the gap created by the incarceration and assist these students in achieving academic and social success in spite of their current situation in which they are placed through no fault of their own.

Due to a parent's incarceration, students may face multiple risk factors associated with the parent's sudden absence, such as stigma, trauma and unexpected change in family structure (Aronson, 2001; Bernstein, 2005; Diller, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Johnston & Waldfogel, 2002, Sagar, 2011). A number of issues increase this student's risk for poor academic performance including school mobility, insufficient adult support, and a tendency to experience emotional disturbances and inappropriate stress responses (Neal,

2009). These events can impact cognitive development and ultimately school performance (Neal, 2009). With the aforementioned problems and issues, poor educational outcomes then become an unintended result. Poor school performance has been well established as a cause of delinquency (Neal, 2009). Many of these indicators such as poor school performance, being retained and weak school attachment link to subsequent incarceration rates (Neal, 2009). This begins to form a vicious cycle of generational incarceration.

Educators and school leaders must assist these students in achieving academic and social success, even as they may cope with problems that we may not fully understand. Currently, teachers and administrators may be ill prepared to counsel or help these children (Diller, 2008).

### **My Story**

During my first year of teaching, I said something that I will forever regret. One of my students was refusing to cooperate. Diablo was a thin, dark chocolate brown male. He stood about 5'1" and no more than 95 pounds soaking wet. His sharp facial features and sturdy frame easily made him attractive to most of the girls his age. His deep set brown eyes and curly lashes added to his charming physical features, but his attitude made him extremely unattractive to teachers. Educators saw this young gentleman as "non-responsive." With his undulating attendance and lack of necessary school supplies, participating effectively in the school curriculum proved difficult. To

my dismay and ultimate frustration, he seemed only to want to disrupt the learning environment of other students. Ashamed to admit this, his absent days, made me happy.

One particular morning while walking to an assembly in the auditorium, I asked all students to remain in line. Of course, the entire class followed my directions with the exception of Diablo. I said to Diablo, “If you don’t learn to follow rules, you might as well get fitted now for your orange suit,” a direct reference to his preparation for incarceration in the penal system. This produced a wry smile on his face. Sadly, the first smile witnessed that year and I would come to understand why.

The following day, I made a call to his home for a parent contact. I remember having to get the number from the counselor because the numbers given in the computer database did not work. The counselor, Mr. Paul, an older African American male, the only other African American on faculty at the time, gave me the number, and told me Diablo lived with his grandmother.

As I conversed with his grandmother, she seemed to experience the same problems with Diablo at home. His grandmother expressively complained that she would be glad when his mother returned. Puzzled, I questioned the date of his mother’s return. She replied, only two months remained on her jail sentence and she anticipated her return for her children when released.

My heart sank as I remembered the wry smile that Diablo showed me the previous day. Immediately, I felt a pang of guilt and remorse. I now felt that he may have smiled to keep from crying as I spoke about his current circumstance. Had I known

that Diablo's mother was incarcerated, I never would have made that comment. In hindsight, poor judgment resounded at that moment, and I should have thought of a better way to express my displeasure. Nevertheless, I apologized profusely to Diablo later that day, but still the apology did little to assuage my guilt. I expressed my sorrow and told him while I might never understand his circumstances; I promised to be more cognizant of his situation.

But, in my defense, how was I supposed to know this information? Was it in his school files? Did the counselor tell me? Was it in an IEP (Individual Education Plan)? No, the truth is we, as educators, do not have "an inkling" if a child has a parent in prison. Indication of parental incarceration is not noted in students' permanent files or cumulative folder. Perhaps...it should be.

Diablo's brother, Angel, was placed in my class the next year. Angel was a caramel colored boy with a baby face and easy smile. He had Diablo's same deep set brown eyes and curly lashes; however he was a bit stockier, he had a more muscular build. By this time they were almost the same height, since Diablo had apparently experienced a growth spurt over the summer. Angel was roughly 5'5" and 135 pounds.

I tried to impute in Angel all of the encouragement and support I had neglected to give his brother and worked consistently to set my level of expectation at heights designed to demand my vision of excellence from him. I realized both Diablo and Angel were very intelligent. These young men easily grasped new concepts. Then, one day while I attended a professional development seminar, reportedly Angel caused a fight in

my class, and the principal removed him to the district's alternative school.

Communication ceased after that point.

A few years later, I saw Diablo at the local high school, and I inquired about Angel's whereabouts. Diablo replied that Angel was in a Juvenile Detention Center. Again, my heart plummeted. I told Diablo to let Angel know I asked about him. One evening a short while later, while watching the evening news, one of the news stories detailed a rash of store robberies that had occurred over the previous few weeks and, to my total dismay, the suspect pictured was none other than my student, Diablo. Had my prediction come true?

Across the United States are many Diablos and Angels. They are not alone. These students increasingly are becoming the rule and not the exception among our African American youths in the education system. As the number of people incarcerated increases, so does the number of children of incarcerated parents. Fifty-two percent of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates report being parents of an estimated 1.7 million minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

But this phenomenon has touched many more lives. With one in every seven and a half African American children having a parent in prison, and an incarceration rate that has more than quadrupled in the past 25 years, the statistics hit home (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010, Pew Trusts, 2010). In my own family, I have uncles and cousins whose children are and have been affected by their incarceration. Additionally, my own brother currently is incarcerated. The fact that he has fathered five children, each of

them having other siblings, increases the number of children's lives he has touched. Counting all of the children affected by his incarceration alone, including my children, his children and their siblings, the number becomes startling. A minimum of 25 children have been affected by just his incarceration alone, with three of the five of his children experiencing the incarceration of both of their parents simultaneously at some point in their lives. Currently, as these children move into adulthood, I see the trend of intergenerational incarceration beginning. His stepsons experienced incarceration; their biological father currently is imprisoned.

As an educator, I am concerned about the plight of all children, but more so those who are most affected by this phenomenon - African American children because they look like me. In them, I see some aspects of myself as a youth. I see them sit quietly in my classroom, unable to concentrate. I see their attendance fluctuating and frequent changes in schools. I see these children hungry. I see them staying after school for tutorials, just to avoid being at home alone or to get an afternoon snack. I see them, but most importantly I feel for them because these Diablos and Angels are also my nieces and nephews. These young children represent single strands woven into the fabric of society and together create a picture that does not bode well for their futures. These are the children of incarcerated parents.

### **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This study gathered information from African American high school students with currently incarcerated parents, regarding their perception of how educators can best meet their needs related to the unique circumstances resulting from their parents' incarceration. These children face a myriad of problems while in the high school environment, from peer pressure to high stakes testing. Adding the surplus of distracters contributed by an incarcerated parent may prove excessive. Listening to their voices provided a clear assessment of their needs from their own perspective.

This study was conducted using high school aged (between 14 – 16 years old) African American students from a large urban southwestern United States high school, whose parents currently are or have been recently incarcerated.

### **Research Questions**

The researcher explored the following research questions:

- (1) What are the schooling experiences of African American students whose parent(s) are incarcerated?
- (2) How has the incarceration of a parent(s) affected the school experience of African American students?



## **Theoretical Framework**

Risk and resilience theory and attachment theory theoretically undergird this research. Risk and resilience theory undergirds this research as it may explain how risks can foster resiliency of adolescents when seemingly adverse conditions pose positive outcomes citation. Risk and resilience theory frames this study as previous research focused on the numerous risk factors that children face while their parents are incarcerated.

Attachment theory undergirds this research as it examines the effect of the parents' absence during the period of incarceration. The attachment theory focuses on familial relationships and the importance of the parent-child relationship. Familial relationships, particularly the parent-child relationship, significantly contribute to development of children into adults.

## **Importance of Study**

The importance of this study rests in the value of giving voice to African American high school students with currently incarcerated parent(s). The study provides insight into how educators best can serve these students in the educational system. The research focused specifically on the perception of African American youth with currently incarcerated parents and their education. The study provided a two-fold importance. One, it elicited the voices of the children most affected by incarceration

and, two, the study focused on those students who traditionally fall below standards on national, state and local assessments.

The researcher sought to examine how the children perceive the effects of their parents' incarceration and, more specifically, how their parents' incarceration affects their education. The voices of these unintended victims, specifically high school African American students, needed to be heard.

Hence, as educators struggle to reach children at their academic pinnacle and take them higher, it is important that teachers, counselors and administrators glean the needs of these children, as the children themselves perceive those needs. Education is one way to break the cycle of generational incarceration. Without education, the previously stated statistics merely enlarge, such as this one: the number of African American men without a high school diploma or GED in prison is about 37%, which is more than the number of African Americans for the same age group who are employed (Pew Trusts, 2010).

“Furthermore, if parental incarceration increases children's subsequent criminality and risk of incarceration, high levels of parental imprisonment could elevate future crime and incarceration” (Wildeman, 2009, p. 266). The far reaching effects, such as a predisposition to be incarcerated as well, also could compromise public safety (Wildeman, 2009). Therefore, this research speaks to our future and the future of our society.

## **Definitions of Terms**

Incarceration: Defined as being currently confined to a federal or state prison.

Children of Color: Specifically children who are of African American and Latino or Hispanic descent. This group also may include people of Asian and Native American descent as well.

Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIPs): Children under the age of 18 who have a biological parent or stepparent who currently is confined to a federal or state prison.

African American: People who are from African descent or lineage.

In-School Suspension (ISS): A place where students are sent as punishment for various school discipline infractions. Students placed in this classroom setting must remain quiet and teachers should send them work. In some schools, a certified teacher may oversee the alternative classroom.

State Mandated Testing: Testing done in accordance with State Law. For example, Texas gives five mandated End of Course Exams (EOC) in high school that students must pass in order to graduate. Currently, they are Algebra, Biology, English I and English II (tests for reading and writing), and US History.

Dove's Landing (DL): A thirty minute period during the day when teachers are asked to form relationships with a small group of students, analogous to most school's homeroom. Students are grouped by specific needs. DL may focus on electives such as band, dance, orchestra or other similar classes. Students needing extra help in core classes, based on prior year's performance on the state mandated tests and grades, are

placed with a core teacher in that subject to give them assistance and tutoring. State tested core classes receive required lessons teachers and students should follow.

Character education lessons are done by all classes. This is also the time during the school day when the announcements, moment of silence and Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag and the state Flag, are done.

Aid for Families of Dependent Children (AFDC): Federal program established by the Social Security Act of 1935 as a grant program to provide cash welfare payments for needy children because of a parent's absence from the home, replaced in 1996 by TANF (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which replaced AFDC and combined the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) and the Emergency Assistance (EA) programs. Key elements include a lifetime limit of 60 months that a family can receive assistance and increased work participation rate requirements (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families thereby providing economic benefits to communities (formerly known as the Federal Food Stamp program) (USDA, nd).

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

The study assumed:

1. Participants were honest in all responses.
2. The researcher transcribed participant interviews accurately, and did not add to or take away from the testimonials.
3. The researcher followed all code of conduct ethics regarding confidentiality of all participants.
4. The researcher complied with the agreement(s) established with the interview process stated in the participant consent form.

Since this study focused primarily on urban African American students, information gathered may not necessarily be true of other populations, such as other ethnic groups or rural school settings. Additionally, effects of incarceration on adult children of incarceration of parents may not be as severe. Correspondingly, other mitigating circumstances, such as parent-child separation, which may be experienced by children of divorce or the death of a parent and economic stressors that often appear even in two-parent households also may share various similar characteristics with these students.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter begins with the theoretical framework followed by an overview of the literature on incarceration of parents and incarceration rates. The chapter then focuses on various issues faced by the students, such as living arrangements, the parents and their arrest, economic stressors and caregiver issues. Next the literature reviewed focused on various circumstances such as visitation, psychological stressors and the programs that address the varied needs. The chapter concludes with information about teachers and the education of children of parental offenders.

#### **Introduction**

Many studies focus on prisoners and their offspring, but too few provide insight from the aspect of the children themselves. Few studies exist from the perspective of those most affected by their parent's incarceration - the children who must live through this ordeal. Research shows that more African American children are affected, but only a small number of studies are written from their perspective (Bernstein, 2005; Coulthard, 2010; Diller, 2008; Finlay, 2007; Jenkins, 2010; Johnson, 2005; Kjellstrand, 2009; King-White, 2010; Posley, 2011). A critical piece missing in the literature is the children's voices about their education. Consequently, in view of the fact that education is compulsory in the United States, we must assume these children attend schools daily.

Therefore, a need exists for research focused on African American students affected by incarceration from an educational aspect.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical frameworks undergird this research, attachment theory and risk and resilience theory. Attachment theory, originally conceptualized by John Bowlby (1969, 1982), generally states human beings come into the world with an internal system that motivates them to seek proximity to significant others in times of need, as a way of protecting themselves from threats and dangers (Tsachi, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Early attachment relationships, one of the central tenets of attachment theory, set the stage for children's later interpersonal functioning (McElwain, Booth-LaForce & Wu, 2011). "According to the theory, early interactions with caregivers provide a context for infants to develop mental representations of self and others" (Fortuna, Roisman, Haydon, Groh & Holland, 2011). In essence, children have a need for secure relationships with adult caregivers and without which normal social and emotional development may not occur (Sagar, 2011).

Bowlby's (1969) original work "focused primarily on infants' biological need for secure early attachment to the mother and the mother's response" (Kaminsky, 2013, p. 29). Early work in attachment theory then focused primarily on early childhood and the relationship between infants and their caregivers. "Within attachment theory, infant behavior associated with attachment is mainly a process that involves proximity-seeking

to an identified attachment figure in fearful or anxiety-provoking situations for the purpose of survival” (Sagar, 2011, p. 5). From the period of six months to two years old, infants become attached to adults who are sensitive and responsive in social interactions and who remains consistent in their life during this time (Sagar, 2011).

Currently, attachment theory also emphasizes the importance of these relationships throughout the life span (Fortuna et. al, 2011). “This alliance contributes to an individual’s feelings of security and continuity in relationships (p. 1, Hilton, 2006). Implying the infant caregiver relationship contributes to more stable relationships in the child’s future. Recent studies show attachment relationships begins before birth, in the womb between the mother and child, further emphasizing attachment as a type of survival behavior critical to normal human development, essential for the continued well-being of an infant (Kaminsky, 2013).

Bowlby’s attachment theory offers an explanatory framework for the discussion of affectionate relationships between individuals. For parental incarceration, the affectionate relationship is between parents and children (1969, 1982). In the case of parental incarceration, this relationship may show problematic for several reasons. One, the child may not have an attachment to the parent, if an incarceration occurred during infancy or early childhood. Given, the statistics show that 25% of imprisoned parents report having a child under the age of four, early childhood attachment can prove challenging (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).



Problems also may occur if the child had been solely with the parent since birth and incarceration is a sudden catastrophic experience. Children of incarcerated parents may be shifted from one residence to another which too impairs healthy attachments (Hilton, 2006). “It is well known that separation from parents can have long-term adverse effects on children’s development, and these concerns are directly applicable to children whose mothers are incarcerated” (Greenberg, 2006, p. 168). Parental loss for any reason can be disruptive, whether it is from death, divorce, military service, incapacity or incarceration; although the stigma attached to incarceration makes coping with this type of separation unique (Hilton, 2006; Wright & Seymour, 2000).

In a recent study on attachment relationships of children with incarcerated mothers, the majority of children (ages 2.5 – 7.5) whose mothers were incarcerated had insecure relationships with mothers and caregivers. A stable care giving situation was the strongest predictor of secure attachment, which has been associated with resilience in other populations of high risk children (Kjellstrand, 2009, p. 18).

This point also is reiterated by the work of Hilton (2006) stating “when a child is separated from a primary caregiver, a disruption in their normal course of development will occur” (pp. 3-4). Any impediment of attachment may lead to second theory undergirding this research, risk and resilience theory.

Risk and resilience theory came from the study of risk factors and their impact on positive self-development (Hodder et. al 2011). The theory emphasizes key protective

processes that help individuals effectively cope with difficult circumstances and emerge tougher (Masten, 2009; Ming, 2011). Researchers have found that some children and adolescents function competently and adaptively in different settings such as school or interpersonal relationships, despite exposure to multiple risks (Kulkarni, Kennedy & Lewis, 2010). “Resilience is fostered by protective factors which ameliorate the effect of risks on development” (Kulkarni et al., 2010, p. 218). Resilience is further described as a “process wherein the individual is able to utilize resources in and outside the self to negotiate current challenges adaptively and, by extension, to develop a foundation on which to rely when future challenges occur” (Yates & Grey, 2012, p. 476). In the researcher’s opinion, the single best description of risk and resilience comes from Killian (2004), she stated, “Resilience is one of the great puzzles of human nature and, at the same time, it appears to be an ordinary magic that enables some children to progress well despite difficulties” (p. 33). Although her research studies the impact of HIV/AIDS on children, that same resilience can be found in children of incarcerated parents. If students experience success while parents are incarcerated, they must develop this “magical” resiliency against the negative factors they may encounter.

The risk and resilience theory focused on African American youth in poverty when Connell, Spencer and Aber (1994) tested a “general model of interpersonal, intrapsychic and behavioral influences on educational outcomes” (p. 494). This study concluded:

“African-American youth’s experiences of their family’s support for them, of their own sense of control over their success and failure in school and of their emotional security with others are regulating their actions in school over and above the influence of their family’s and their neighborhood’s economic conditions and their gender.”

The above finding suggests familial support, a greater indicator of resiliency than economic conditions or gender. Emphasizing familial support as an important aspect of risk and resiliency theory and attachment to having positive outcomes later in life, questions what happens when parents are incarcerated? If these children do not have parental support due to the parent’s incarceration, they must develop the resiliency from other areas of their lives. They sometimes must overcome multiple risks, the risk of poverty and separation, both which may result from parental incarceration. Risk and resilience theory and attachment theory support the established research question as response to why CIP’s show various educational outcomes. The next portion of this chapter describes parental incarceration and the effect this phenomenon may have on the children.

## **Incarceration of Parents**

### **Paternal Incarceration**

“When a father is sentenced to prison, his entire family is affected economically, emotionally, and psychologically” (Walker, 2011, p. 1). A father’s incarceration, more

often than not, leaves mothers behind to care for the children. Without the financial support of the father, many times the key provider, families can experience periods of homelessness, living in shelters, cars, or on the street.

The cost of incarceration goes beyond the actual dollar amount of caring for the prisoner, estimated at more than \$20,000 per year. The cost undeniably extends to the public assistance most mothers must acquire to support the children left behind (Walker, 2011). As a result, Walker (2011) estimated this cost averages \$385 in monthly welfare benefits and about \$300 in food stamp benefits, which translates to a yearly benefit of about \$8000.

Walker (2011) similarly discovered, when fathers are incarcerated, a greater propensity exists for children over the age of five to have an increase in aggressive behavior and adverse effects on cognitive development. Undoubtedly, mothers of these children show greater risks for being depressed. “Research on women of incarcerated men identifies high levels of poverty, stress and mistreatment from institution staff” (Rivard, 2011, p. 1).

### **Maternal Incarceration**

From 1991 to 2007, the number of incarcerated mothers increased anywhere from 122% to 131% depending on the source (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Mauer, Nellis & Schimir, 2009) with as many as 80% of incarcerated mothers being the primary caregivers of children prior to their arrest (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007). “Between 1995 and 2003, the average annual increase in women in prisons and jails was 5.2

percent, compared to a 3.4 percent annual increase in the number of incarcerated men” (Kaminsky, 2013). This makes women offenders the fastest growing incarcerated population in the United States (Bell, 2008). “The impact of this increase is profound” (Greenberg, 2006, p. 167). Nevertheless, racial disparities still exist; African American women are three times more likely than White women to be incarcerated while Latinas are 69% more likely than White women to be incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Kaminsky, 2013).

“The ‘War on Drugs’ contributed to an overwhelming increase in the number of incarcerated women. This punitive policy affected more citizens in low-income communities than any other segment of the United States” (Bell, 2008, p. 2). Children of imprisoned fathers tend to live with their mothers, but when compared, only 37% of mothers reported that caregiver during incarceration was the other parent, as opposed to 88.4% fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Consequently, children whose mothers are incarcerated are five times more likely to end up in foster care when compared to those whose fathers are incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Greenberg, 2006).

Many times children of incarcerated parents were “at-risk” even before the parent was arrested. Female prisoners report inadequate wages, transient income and fairly high rates of homelessness before admission to correctional facilities (Arditti, Lambert-Shute & Joest, 2003; Bates, Lawrence-Wills & Hairston, 2003; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Mumola, 2000). In addition, these women are more likely to report past physical and sexual abuse as well as medical and mental health problems (Glaze & Maruschak,

2010; Kaminsky, 2013). Glaze and Maruschak (2010) uncovered these numbers about mothers in state prison:

Mothers were two times more likely than fathers to report homelessness in the year before arrest, four times more likely to report past physical or sexual abuse, and almost one and a half times more likely to have either a current medical or mental health problem (p. 7).

Many children of incarcerated mothers are affected by unceasing trauma, such as frenzied lifestyles, violence, family anger and abuse (Greenberg, 2006).

Most women are incarcerated for non-violent crimes such as property offenses or drug offenses and less often for violent offenses (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Mumola 2000). Close to three-quarters (73.9%) of women incarcerated in federal prisons were for drug offenses, with 61% being for trafficking (Mumola, 2000). Glaze and Maruschak indicated that incarcerated mothers were most likely to be property, drug or public-order offenders (2010). More than 85% of parents in state prisons reported some time of past drug use and 58% admitted to using drugs in the month prior to their current offense and about a third of the mothers in state prison admitted to committing their crime to get drugs or money for drugs (Mumola, 2000).

### **Parental Incarceration by the Numbers**

The extant literature addresses a variety of issues pertaining to incarceration of parents. Concrete figures counting the children of incarcerated parents or the actual numbers remain unknown; no real statistics exist calculating the children impacted by

rising numbers of imprisoned people (Johnston, 2005). Mumola (2000), the Pew Trust Study (2008) and Glaze and Maruschak (2010) gave various statistics, such as the percentages of persons and characteristics of prisoners in federal and state prisons. The newer Pew Trust study (2010) declared, “2.7 million children have a parent behind bars” (Pew Charitable Trust, 2010, p. 4) Other literature focused on the caregivers of these youth (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Newby, 2008; Phillips & Bloom, 1998; Smith, Krisman, Strozier & Marley, 2004). Government agencies are aware of this phenomenon and want to provide mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents (Loper & Tuerk, 2006; Perry, 2006; Tonn, 2007). Parental involvement issues have been addressed, along with other issues such as children’s contact with the incarcerated parent, and parenting skills for parents returning home (Johnston & Carlin, 2004; Kamisky, 2013; Loper & Tuerk, 2006; Sisson, 2006).

“Despite the large numbers of children affected by the phenomena of parental incarceration and the multiple ways that these children are affected, very little is genuinely known about the lives of these children or the impact that the event of incarceration (or in some cases multiple incarcerations) has on them” (Johnston, 2005, p. 3). “Research that focuses on children whose parents are incarcerated has been quite limited” (Hairston, 2007, p. 2). These children have been described as the least served and the least studied group of “at-risk” youth (Johnson, 2005), “an almost invisible population” (Hairston, 2007, p. 2; Books, 2007). Researchers explored issues related to crime deterrence, recidivism and cost of incarceration, but few investigators have

considered the financial and emotional costs to the children and families left behind (Kjellstrand, 2009).

Investigations on the effect “America’s War on Drugs” legislations impacted parental incarceration and, more especially, the resulting increase in incarceration of women contribute to the depth of knowledge on incarcerated persons (Unruh, Bullis & Yokanoff, 2004; Velazquez, Roughneck Sternber, Mullen, Carbonari & Kan, 2007). The voices of incarcerated mothers paint a vivid picture of incarceration’s effect on their children and their children’s caregivers (Smith et al., 2004). Luke’s (2002) article emphasized how increased maternal incarceration has affected the child welfare system and how it affects the mother-child relationship. Programs exist to help foster the mother-child relationship during the period of incarceration (Bruns, 2006). Hanlon and others indicated that children of incarcerated parents experience a profound vulnerability due to their parent’s incarceration (2005). While research exists on children separated from their parents due to divorce, death, abandonment, and physical or emotional illness, little is known about separation due to parental incarceration (Johnson, 2005). Recently, Kamisky (2013) collected data from a longitudinal study of mothers and their discipline practices after release from prison and discovered mothers reported use of nonviolent discipline and other discipline actions such as psychological aggression associated with higher parent stress and maternal depression.



## **Incarceration Rates**

“The United States is the world leader in incarceration” (Rivard, 2011, p. 2).

“Driven by a fourfold increasing in the imprisonment rate, parental imprisonment could have emerged as a historically novel—and distinctively American –form of childhood disadvantage (Wildeman, 2009, p. 265). In the years from 1991 to midyear 2007, parents held in state and federal prisons increased by 79%; children of incarcerated parents increased by 80%, with the most rapid growth coming between the years of 1991 to 1997 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). The Pew Trusts (2010) report estimated that “2.7 million children have a parent behind bars – 1 in every 28 children (3.6 percent) has a parent incarcerated, up from 1 in 125 just 25 years ago” (p. 4).

The “War on Drugs” has been a dismal failure in its efforts to stem the tide on drug usage, but it has created casualties of this war: the mothers who have been incarcerated and the families decimated by the incarceration (Arditti & McClintock, 2001; Neal, 2009). A myriad of issues have impacted the increased incarceration rates of people of color, including but not limited to, “America’s War on Drugs”, lack of encouragement in pursuing educational opportunities and unrealistic prevention programs designed to decrease drug use. Yet, many of the “War on Drugs” crimes are considered non-violent which is evidenced by the fact that two-thirds of the aforementioned parents were incarcerated for non-violent offenses.

Approximately “2.4 million American children have a mother or father in jail or prison currently. More than 7 million, or one in ten of the nation’s children, have a

parent under criminal justice supervision – incarcerated, on probation, or on parole” (Bernstein, 2005, p. 2), which points to the verity that these rates are increasing.

An estimated 809 thousand prisoners of the 1.5 million held in the nation’s prisons at midyear 2007 were parents of minor children, or children under age 18. Parents held in the nation’s prisons – 52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates – reported having an estimated 1.7 million minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. resident population under age 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010, pg. 1).

Ming (2011) estimated that, on any given day, almost 10 million children have a parent under criminal justice supervision, either incarcerated or on probation or parole. Again, these are mostly estimates, as no exact number can be found because currently no method exists of identifying or tracking children whose parents are incarcerated. They are not counted by the child welfare system, educational systems or law enforcement agencies. Therefore, it is estimated using the numbers provided by currently incarcerated parents or foster care numbers (Ming, 2011; Seymour, 2001).

In 2008, the Pew Trust Report suggested that one in one hundred adults were incarcerated in the United States. This same Pew Report (2008) stated that, for people of color, the statistics were more egregious; for African American males over the age of 18, 1 in 15 were incarcerated, and these numbers were more pronounced for those ages 20 to 24, where one in nine men were incarcerated (Pew, 2008). For African American females, the numbers are similar, where 1 in 100 is incarcerated compared to one in 355

for Whites and 1 in 297 for Hispanic females (Pew, 2008). Within the Latino population, Hispanic males are one in 36 men behind bars, when compared to White males, which average one in 106 (Pew, 2008).

African American children were seven and a half times more likely to have a parent in prison than White children, while Hispanic children were two and a half times more likely as White children to have an inmate parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). The newer Pew (2010) report stated that one in nine African American (11.4%) children has a parent who currently is incarcerated, while one in 28 Hispanic (3.5%) children has an incarcerated parent and only one in 57 White (1.8%) children has an incarcerated parent. This clearly shows that children of color are affected far more by this phenomenon than their White counterparts. “The deep disadvantage of Black children of low-education parents is also clear; more than 1 in 2 Black children born in 1990 to high school dropouts had a parent imprisoned” (Wildeman, 2009, p. 266).

These numbers do not include those parents who are in the juvenile justice system or the children born to teen parents while they are involved in the juvenile justice system (Johnston, 2005). Since these are juveniles, they are usually under the age of 18 and are not in the adult penal system as of yet. If these children also were added, the number would be higher.

### **Parental Arrest**

The loss of a parent for any reason can be traumatizing whether it's due to death, divorce, or moving away, and children always experience the loss of a parent as a

traumatic event (Bernstein, 2005; Travis, 2000). The impact of an arrest can be especially traumatizing, if the child is separated abruptly from the custodial parent and little or no information is given about what happened, why it happened or what to expect (Bernstein, 2005; Travis, 2005).

An even more traumatic event may be experienced if the child witnessed the arrest. The scenario below is typical of what happens during parental arrest:

*Keith, age 5, was in the living room of the apartment he shared with his mother, Jessica, and 6-month-old breast-fed baby sister, Andrea, when five police officers entered. After a brief conversation, Jessica was handcuffed and taken away by four of the officers, while the children watched and cried (Greenberg, 2006, p. 168).*

These events have long-term effects on children developmentally, psychologically, emotionally and economically. For some, the scenario above describes a climatic event in a life that may already feel like a roller coaster ride with no end (Greenberg, 2006). Thankfully, most children are not present at the time of their parent's arrest and family members are reluctant to tell the children that their parent has been incarcerated (Bernstein, 2005; Travis, 2005). This may cause even more stress on the child because he or she does not know what has happened. The abrupt loss of a primary caregiver is very traumatic (Greenberg, 2006).

## **Economic Stressors**

Once a parent has been arrested and subsequently incarcerated, the child is at an increased risk for another of society's ills: poverty. Before incarceration, 60% of fathers reported having full-time jobs at the time of imprisonment (Mumola, 2000; Travis, 2005). Mothers were less likely to have full-time jobs with the most common source of income being wages or public assistance (Mumola, 2000; Travis, 2005). Nevertheless, during incarceration, those wages and salaries cannot be earned. The support from the incarcerated parent comes to an end. This places an extraordinary strain on the current caregivers' financial resources as they struggle to make ends meet during the period of parental incarceration. In the case of elderly grandparents on fixed incomes, this can have an even more detrimental effect on the family budget.

One study estimated that 23% of all non-custodial fathers live in poverty, and, of these fathers, nearly one-fourth are incarcerated (Unruh, Bullis & Yovanoff, 2004). Caregivers may have to rely upon benefits from the government programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the reformed AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program. Approximately 44% of families caring for children of an incarcerated parent were receiving welfare payments (Travis, 2005). However, under recent welfare reform laws, TANF support is more limited than in the past, as lifetime eligibility has been capped at 60 months and work requirements have been implemented (Travis, 2005).

Even before the reform, most caregivers reported that they did not receive sufficient resources to meet basic needs. With the average sentence of parents being over 80 months in state prison and over 103 months in federal prison (Mumola, 2000); one easily can see how these benefits may not be very helpful at all, especially for elderly caregivers, such as grandparents. This increased financial stress can produce negative consequences for caregivers' behavior such as harsh inconsistent parenting, emotional abuse and physical abuse which will lead to emotional and behavioral problems for the children (Simmons, 2000; Travis, 2002).

Students are able to receive breakfast and lunch without cost or at a reduced price if the caregiver knows how to apply for the school lunch program benefits. They must provide proof of income, numbers and identity of all members of the household. For free lunch, students must be within 130% of the Federal income poverty guidelines; in order to receive reduced lunch prices, families must fall within 185% of the federal income poverty guidelines (Fed. Reg, Food and Nutrition Service, 2012, p. 17006). For example, for a family of four, the Federal poverty level is \$23,550 (Fed. Reg, Food and Nutrition Service, 2012, p. 17006). To receive lunches at a reduced price, a family of four must have an annual salary below \$43,568; to receive free lunch, the family must have an annual salary below \$30, 615 (Fed. Reg, 2012, p. 17006).

## **Children's Issues**

Kjellstrand (2009) reported that the connections between financial problems, ineffective parenting, single parenthood and depression leading to eventual poor outcomes for children have been well documented in research on the general population. These children may face all of the aforementioned and more when a parent is incarcerated. Incarceration of a parent is challenging and potentially traumatic (Annie E. Casey Foundation [Casey Foundation], 2007). The children of incarcerated parents face many issues that ultimately affect their school performance, such as drastic changes in living arrangements, the child's familiarity with the new caregiver, the relationship between the parent and child at the time of incarceration, and, prominently, the psychological issues encompassing the incarceration of a parent (Lee, 2005). "The trauma to a child is similar to divorce or experiencing the death of a loved one, but there are no official ways to acknowledge the wound" (Lee & Kreisher, 2002). In addition, children of prisoners also may suffer from anxiety and attention disorders or post-traumatic stress. They are more likely to have a number of different caregivers and, as a result of the lack of consistency in caregivers, they tend to cause trouble in school.

The arrest and removal of a parent from a child's life forces that child to confront emotional, social and economic consequences that may trigger behavior problems, poor outcomes in school and disruption or severance of the relationship with the incarcerated parent that may persist even after the parent is released from prison (Casey Foundation, 2007, p. 2).

Most children of parents in prison have been subjected to a variety of risk factors even before the parent's incarceration, such as poverty, family involvement with drugs and alcohol, previous separations, violence and crime (Bernstein, 2005; Casey Foundation, 2007; Children's Services Practice Notes, 2002; Johnson, 2005). Important to note is that most of these children, even before incarceration, did not live in a "traditional nuclear family;" about 75% of the parents were divorced or unmarried at the time of arrest (Casey Foundation, 2007). Other variables that affect these children are the age of the child at the time of parental incarceration, nature of the parent's crime, length of sentence, availability of family or community support and the degree of stigma that the community associates with incarceration (Lee, 2005). Due to the added effects of social, community and institutional stigma, children may face a more complicated challenge than other parental absences such as divorce or military deployment. (Casey Foundation, 2007). There is a need for more research that explores the possible risk mechanisms that exist through these multiple dimensions for children and families with an incarcerated parent (Kjellstrand, 2009).

### **Living Arrangements**

The penalty paid is steep for children whose parents are incarcerated. They sacrifice their home, safety and primary person with whom they have a familial relationship (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Newby, 2008). Usually these new caretakers have little or no warning and agree to care for the children out of a sense of duty to the incarcerated parent or the family (Newby, 2008). "Studies of parents in prison show that



before going to prison, some parents have all or some of their children living with them; while some have none” (Casey Foundation, 2007, p.4). Most children (88%) live with their mother during their father’s incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Newby, 2008). “When mothers are incarcerated, their children are most often cared for by grandparents or other relatives” (Casey Foundation, 2007, p. 4). For those in Federal prison, the numbers are slightly higher with 91% of fathers reporting that their minor child was with the mother and 31% of mothers reporting the father being the current caregiver (Mumola, 2000).

Some parents have more than one child by more than one other parent, with 31% of state prisoners having two or more children and 41% of federal prisoners having two or more children (Mumola, 2000). Therefore, the effects may be exponential if the mother has three children, each with different fathers. One child may be with their father, but the other children may be placed with a grandmother, aunt or other relative, or they may be in foster care. Among parents in state prisons who had lived with their children prior to incarceration, mothers were three times more likely than fathers to report that they had provided most of the daily care for their children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

Although many prisoners report their children did not live with them, they also report being involved in their children’s lives (Casey Foundation, 2007). “One researcher found that 85% of paroled mothers had lived with their children prior to incarceration and 84% of the mothers were living with at least some of their children

after release” (Smith et.al, 2004, p. 188). Clearly, the removal of the mother from the home has a more detrimental effect, just by looking at the data of state inmates which indicate 77% of mothers reported being the primary caretaker of their minor children before incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

“Of the estimated 1.3 million children of state and federal inmates in 1997, an estimated 24,000 were in foster care and 155,049 were in the care of grandparents” (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002, p. 1). A variety of other living arrangements exist for the remaining children, such as living with the other parent as discussed earlier, with other relatives, in some other form of care or on their own (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). According to Johnson and Waldfogel (2002), for children of imprisoned mothers, about 17% live with the father, 65 percent live with a grandparent or other relative, six percent live in foster or agency care and 12 percent have other living arrangements. In the same study for fathers, the statistics were slightly different (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). Seventy-seven percent of their children lived with the other parent while 15 percent lived with a grandparent or other relative; six percent had other living arrangements, while only about one percent of their children lived in foster or agency care (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). Glaze and Maruschak found that “88% of fathers reported at least one of their children was in the care of the child’s mother, compared to 37% of mothers who reported the father as the child’s current caregiver” (p. 5, 2010). Other studies indicate about two percent of fathers and 10 percent of mothers report they have children in foster care (Casey Foundation, 2007). “Changes in the female incarceration rate

explain 30% of the increase in foster care caseloads between 1985 and 2000” (Wildeman, 2009, p. 266).

Noteworthy here is that, for some children, the environment after a parent’s incarceration may become more stable. Some research has been gathered that reports that children who lived with parents who were substance abusers report having a more peaceful and caring home environment and were more satisfied when placed into the homes of other “surrogate mothers” (usually grandmothers) (Hanlon et al., 2000; Kjellstrand, 2009). This gives some credibility to the idea that encouraging care giving situations may protect the child from harmful outcomes associated with incarceration (Kjellstrand, 2009).

### **Caregivers**

Most mothers prefer to leave their children with relatives (Bell, 2008). The mother hopes that these family members will provide a safe, loving and stable environment for their children (Bell, 2008). “Among African Americans, kinship caregivers are mostly maternal grandmothers” (Bell, 2008, p. 7). During incarceration and subsequent release, incarcerated mothers depend primarily on their family members to help raise their children (Bell, 2008). While grandmothers strive to protect and prevent their grandchildren from going into foster care, they, too, face multiple challenges, such as economic struggles and health issues which may be exacerbated by the mother’s absence (Bell, 2008). Grandmothers “may experience health problems such as arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, stroke and mild heart attacks” (Bell, 2008, p.

15). “Findings suggest that poor physical health of grandmothers compromise their quality of life with their grandchildren. As a result, children reported an increase in feelings of fear, loss and abandonment” (Bell, 2008, p. 15).

Sometimes new caregivers face another dilemma, that of developing a relationship with the child. Prior to incarceration of the parent, the caregiver may have had little or no contact with the child. Some of these new caregivers may not be entirely thrilled about caring for the child, especially for grandparents who feel that they are already past the child-rearing age. They may feel that they are too old to be raising a child or lack the patience or parenting skills necessary to rear another generation of children. They also may have to deal with issues of failing health.

In order to maintain contact with their children, incarcerated parents must maintain a stable relationship with the child’s caregiver (Carlson, 2010). Caretakers may not have had an especially close relationship with the mother or child prior to incarceration and are suddenly shifted into the role of the parent (Carlson, 2010). Also, caretakers may feel guilty if they do not help with raising children while relatives are in prison so the child may end up in foster care (Carlson, 2010). Depending on the sentence, caretakers may have to make a long-term commitment to raising the child or children (Carlson, 2010). An unexpected role is one of “gatekeeper,” since the caregiver decides when and how often children visit their parents (Carlson, 2010). Some mothers may feel guilt knowing the person they love and care about is struggling to take care of a child not their own (Carlson, 2010).

Caregivers are essential to helping children cope with feelings of separation, fear, and abandonment (Bell, 2008). They must become “psychologists” and become familiar with the various aspects of “mother-child” separation and emotional health of children. Children may experience anxiety, isolation, attachment and trust issues, sleeping and eating disorders, problems in school and negative peer involvement (Bell, 2008). The grandparents must understand how to navigate through this landmine of feelings and emotions.

### **Visitation**

One issue that many families of incarcerated parents face is visitation between the child and the incarcerated parent. For many parents, visits from their children are few and far between. “A majority of both fathers (57%) and mothers (54%) in state prison reported never having a personal visit with their children since admission” (Mumola, 2000, p. 1). Recently, research found more than 75% of parents in state prisons reported having some contact with their children, although the majority of contact was in the form of telephone calls or letters (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

For children of incarcerated mothers, the problem is confounded by the lack of women’s prisons. Mothers are incarcerated an average of 160 miles away from their families (Travis, 2002). Sixty-two percent of state prisoners are more than 100 miles away from their homes and 84 percent of federal prisoners are more than 100 miles away from their last place of residence, with 43 percent of those being more than 500 miles

away (Mumola, 2000; Travis, 2002). Despite this, incarcerated mothers tend to stay in touch with their children more often than fathers (Hairston, 2007).

Distance affects visits. For prisoners with homes less than 50 miles, 54% reported one or more visits within the previous month, compared with 44% of prisoners receiving a visit when the family lived within the 50 to 100 mile range from the prison. When the family lived within 101 to 500 miles from the prison 30% report having a visit within the prior month, while only 16% of prisoners living 500 miles or more from their families reported a visit within the prior month (Hairston, 2007). Distance adds additional financial strain on those caretakers wanting the children to have contact with the incarcerated parent. “Incarcerated mothers report that the separation from their children is one of the most stress-provoking aspects of being incarcerated” (Carlson, 2010, p. 7).

But there are other ways of fostering contact. In fact, 56% of mothers in state prison reported weekly contact, either by telephone, mail or personal visits, with their children while 39% of fathers reported the same (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). While telephone contact may be costly, mail is an easier way of fostering contact for those children who are old enough to read and write letters. Mothers and fathers who had lived with their children, or were their child’s primary caretaker prior to incarceration, were more likely to report having at least weekly contact with their children than those who had not lived with them (Carlson, 2010; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

## **Psychological Stressors**

All of the factors that children of incarcerated parents face bring about a myriad of psychological problems. Research is limited in this area, but one study suggested, “Children of incarcerated parents are three to six times more likely to exhibit violent or serious delinquent behavior” (Lee, 2005, p. 85). The extent to which children are affected by the incarceration depends on their unique situation and is affected by a number of variables. Some children may suffer from a poor self-image from identification with the incarcerated parent, as well as low self-esteem, especially when there is an awareness of the social stigma associated with incarceration (Bernstein, 2005; Lee, 2005). Also, children suffer cognitive setbacks due to intrusive thoughts about parents, concern about their future and the future of their parents (Bernstein, 2005; Lee, 2005). Cognitive setbacks also can occur due to flashbacks of the traumatic events surrounding the arrest if witnessed by the child (Gabel & Johnston, 1995; Lee, 2005).

These children face many emotional stressors such as fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, abandonment, embarrassment, guilt, resentment and withdrawal from friends and family and may elicit behaviors such as physical aggression, acting out inappropriately and disruptive behavior (Bernstein, 2005; Gabel & Johnston, 1995; Lee, 2005). One study found that, even with group therapy, children aged 6 -12, did not show any statistically significant differences in depression, anxiety or forgiveness with the completion of an 8 week treatment program (Sagar, 2011). These results may have been

because the children were not encouraged by their caregivers or because the group intervention was solely for the kids and not for the entire family system (Sagar, 2011).

Their caregiver may compare them to their incarcerated parent, which compounds these emotional stressors, by commenting, “you’re going to end up in jail just like your daddy” (Johnson, 2005).

Greenberg (2006) summarized it as the five “S’s” with which children must learn to deal:

*Stigma, shame, separation, secrecy and silence* - play a big role in their lives.

*Stigma* describes how teachers, classmates, and society in general perceive and behave towards children when they learn that their mothers or fathers are in jail or prison. *Separation* – is the empty space in children’s lives without their parent. *Shame* is what many children feel when they understand what is happening, and when people make thoughtless or unkind comments. This leads to keeping the parent’s imprisonment *secret* in an attempt to avoid the pain of stigma and shame. *Silence* refers to the behavior of all concerned-the child who has no one with whom to talk who might understand, and others who do not know what to say (p. 169).

All of these issues affect the education of the child. The child comes to school already emotionally and cognitively stressed. They already are at a disadvantage before they ever enter the school setting. They have been set up for diminished academic performance, behavioral difficulties and truancy (Lee, 2005). These factors are only



compounded by the fact that many of these are children of color who have another set of mitigating factors waiting for them at the door merely because of the color of their skin.

### **Supportive Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents**

There are numerous community programs throughout the country to help these children, but programs are needed within school settings to address the issues these children face. The Child Welfare League of America, in collaboration with the US Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, operates the Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners that conducts research and evaluations, provides training and technical assistance, collects and disseminates data in order to increase awareness among service systems that come in contact with these families, such as law enforcement, prisons and social services (Lee, 2005). The goal is to improve information about children of incarcerated parents and develop resources to help them be successful (Lee, 2005). Some programs provide direct services to families such as Family Matters, a program in Little Rock, Arkansas, which serves children from birth to 18 years of age whose mothers are incarcerated (Lee, 2005). Some programs are situated in prisons to help parents help the children deal with the issue of separation due to incarceration (Luke, 2002). Others provide mentoring programs for these youth by providing positive role models to build academic confidence and increase social skills (Jones, 2008).

Former parole officer Marilyn Gambrell started an in-school support program in Houston's Smiley High School called "No More Victims" (Peltier, 2006). This particular program had students meet daily to discuss the issues that were going on in their lives. In daily meetings, they discussed their own feelings of anger, suicide, violence, victimization, trauma and abuse as it related to having a parent imprisoned (Peltier, 2006). Children may feel uncertain about their future and the future of their parents. Teachers should try to alleviate the child's uncertainty by talking with the student and assuring them they will get through this time. For many students, their life has suffered a major disruption, especially if they are separated from the mother that provided security for them. Reassure the child, especially young children, that the parent did not leave because of something the child has done (Children's Services Practice Notes, 2002).

Students of color are affected disproportionately by incarceration. "Parental imprisonment was uncommon for White children, but was not uncommon for Black children" (Wildeman, 2009, p. 272). They must deal with a plethora of issues in their lives before they ever enter a classroom. Education may not be their first priority when they enter the school doors. As educators, it is imperative that we recognize these children and do what we can to assist these students in being successful academically. The egregious disproportionate risks for young men of color have been noticed by the nation. President Barak Obama has launched an initiative to help young men of color by creating opportunities for these young males to be successful (White House Press

Release, 2014). The White House official webpage (2014) states the new initiative “will take a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to build ladders of opportunity and unlock the full potential of boys and young men of color.” The president encourages businesses and leading foundations to collaborate and create programs and adopt approaches to put these young men on the path to success (White House Press Release, 2014).

### **Education for Children of the Incarcerated**

Education or the lack thereof, plays a pivotal role in parental incarceration. “High school dropouts were 12 to 16 times more likely to go to prison than college-educated men,” with nearly 60% of Black male dropouts born in 1965-1969 having been imprisoned by 1999 (Wildeman, 2009, p. 266). Research indicates that imprisonment has become relatively common for Black women with low levels of educational attainment (Wildeman, 2009). One in four African American children born in 1990 had a father who did not complete high school (Wildeman, 2009). “Children often perform more poorly in school when their mother is incarcerated” (Carlson, 2010, p. 19).

School may be the only constant in some of these children’s lives. It can give meaningful support (Ming, 2011). It can be a place where the students are encouraged. In a study by Ming on the impact of community and resilience on African American children of incarcerated parents, findings revealed that teachers encouraged students and invested their time and energy into making sure they had positive school experiences.

The teachers rescued the children and helped the young people to become stronger and have confidence in themselves (Ming). For these young people, school was an intellectual and social outlet (Ming). School nurtured their personal motivation and they were able to “own their academic lives through their teacher’s guidance” (Ming, p. 277).

Students may be characterized as “at risk;” this designation denotes that these children, for one or more reasons, are not likely to be successful in the education process. The state designates the following “at-risk” indicators (TEA, 2014):

1. Not scoring satisfactory on a readiness or assessment instrument in Pre-K, kindergarten or first, second or third grade
2. Being in secondary school (grades 7 – 12) and not maintaining a passing grade (70%) in two or more core subjects during a semester or during the preceding semester or school year.
3. Not matriculating from one grade to the next for one or more years.
4. Scoring less than 110% of the passing level on the state assessment after not performing satisfactorily the previous year.
5. Pregnant or a parent.
6. Placed in an alternative education program.
7. Expelled during the preceding or current school year.
8. Currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release.
9. Previously reported to have dropped out of school.

10. English is not their primary language.
11. Is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (Child Welfare) or has during the current school year been referred to the department by a school official, officer of juvenile court or law enforcement.
12. Is homeless
13. Resided in the preceding school year or currently resides in a residential placement facility in the district, including detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house or group foster home.

Most of these indicators also are characteristics of children of incarcerated parents. Teachers may be aware of these indicators, but are not aware of the various reasons that could be behind them.

While it is important to view what the state identifies as “at-risk” indicators, it is more important to examine these students from a positive standpoint as opposed to a deficit point of view. Deficit thinking “hinders the ability and willingness of educators to recognize the strengths of students from diverse ethnic, racial, and language groups” (Young, 2004, p. 381). The resiliency is the strength of African American children of incarcerated parents. Educators should embrace the strength of these students and capitalize on that strength as resource. Focus on these strengths rather than the apparent shortcomings. Every child has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are

charged with the awesome task of recognizing the strengths of each student and capitalizing on the strength while simultaneously teaching to minimize their weaknesses (Young, 2004).

### **Teachers and Children of Parental Offenders**

Although this study deals with education and children of incarcerated parents, an important part of the education of each child is the teacher. Teachers are a critical resource in the process of education. They are the “keepers of knowledge.” In particular, a classroom is a place where students learn both the written and unwritten rules of society. Teachers are charged with educating the pupils in their class with the subject curriculum standards and ensuring that the students not only learn and comprehend the curriculum, but also are able to prove knowledge on high stakes tests. The teacher must adhere to the standards set forth by the nation, state, district and school policies. As children of incarcerated parents enter the classroom, the issue becomes one of equity.

“Teachers are the key to educational excellence and equity” (Hernandez, 2001, p. 4). Gay described teaching as “a contextual and situational process” and further stated, “it is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students are included in its implementation” (2000, p. 21). This fact often is ignored when teaching children of color, especially if they are poor (Gay, 2000). Instead, Gay insisted, students “are

taught from the middle class, Eurocentric frameworks that shape school practices” (2000, p. 21). For many of the students, they fall directly into these categories. They are more likely than not, poor and children of color.

The processes that occur in schools and individual classrooms influence educational outcomes significantly (Hernandez, 2001). Often school achievement is more closely correlated with social class (Hernandez). Additionally, work conditions of teachers are in part determined by the social class of the communities that they serve, with teachers in lower and working class communities more likely to experience increased resource constraints, fewer rewards for good work and incentives, and have less autonomy (Hernandez). These teachers also may be discouraged from more complex forms of teaching (Hernandez). Hernandez further stated that effective teachers are the exception more so than the rule: “they are more dedicated, better organized, and more efficient in classroom management” (p. 105).

Ladson-Billings (1994), in her study on successful teachers of African American students, highlighted the basic tenets of culturally relevant teaching (Hernandez, 2001). She characterized such educational practices as intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically empowering (Hernandez, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings (1994) and Hernandez (2001) both agreed that teachers should:

- help students become intellectual leaders in the classroom
- make students apprentices in a learning community rather than teach in an isolated and unrelated way

- legitimize students' real-life experiences by making them part of the "official" curriculum, treat students as competent learners
- provide students with instructional scaffolding to move them from what they know to what they need to know
- make instruction the focus of the classroom
- believe that real education is about extending students' thinking and abilities

Bennett (2011) affirmed that positive teacher expectations increase student achievement. Additionally, she stated, "we need teachers who are both culturally competent and antiracist" (Bennett, 2011, p. 28). Equity pedagogy is needed in schools across the US, not just in inner cities (Bennett, 2011). As these students enter the public education system, they each deserve to have teachers that Hernandez, Ladson-Billings and Bennett reference. Children of incarcerated parents are entitled to an equitable education as are all students. A recent study suggested that teachers of children whose parents are incarcerated may have lower expectations of these students (Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2010). This same article also stated that teachers who had experiences with children whose parents were incarcerated reported various observances such as "greater academic-related problem behaviors than other students" and greater problematic behaviors such as increased tardiness and absenteeism (Dallaire, et. al, 2010, p. 288).



## **Conclusion**

Children of incarcerated parents deal with a variety of stressors even before they reach our classrooms. African American children are more likely than others to experience parental incarceration. These students face a myriad of issues such as separation from parents, the stigma attached to having a parent incarcerated, being in an environment that may be new to them or not in their own homes at all, and maintaining a relationship with their parent. We know that these children must attend schools; therefore, education may be the way to break the cycle and help these students to become contributing members of society and not repeat the choices of their parents. It is important that teachers, school counselors and administrators know how to help these children. Educators know what students need. We, as educators, need to find out what those needs of children of incarcerated parents are. In reviewing the literature, little research is found directly from the children giving their needs in their own words.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explained why a qualitative case study was needed to answer the question of whether parental incarceration affects an African American student's schooling and how the research will be carried out to answer this question. It begins with the explanation of why this study fits the qualitative paradigm. It further discusses how the study will be completed, including the selection of participants and data collection protocols. Also, a detailed description of the study questions is given. Finally the chapter ends with how the researcher anticipates the data will be analyzed.

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to elicit the voices of those children whose parents currently are incarcerated. I used qualitative research in the form of a case study to examine how these children perceive they are affected by their parents' incarceration and, more specifically, how African American high school students perceive their parent's incarceration affects their education. This research theoretically is based in critical research as it gives voice to a marginalized group in our society, specifically, children of color whose parents are incarcerated (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005). The researcher will attempt to hear the voice of these students who have been silenced due to the particular circumstances in which they find themselves; as the research indicates,

parental incarceration more profoundly affects children of color, more profoundly, African American children.

This study obtained data from African American high school students whose parents currently are incarcerated. This research also is theoretically undergirded in risk and resilience theory and attachment theory. “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). Therefore, a qualitative case study was conducted to gain the perspective of these adolescents as it relates to their schooling and the effect of their parent’s incarceration. Because the case study was anchored in real-life situations, it resulted in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon, which gives credence to using this type of research to give voice of the students affected by incarceration (Merriam, 1988).

Based on an interpretivist epistemology whereby “social reality is seen as a set of meanings that are constructed by the individuals who participate in that reality” (Gall & Gall, 2005, p. 305). In this case, the main purpose of this qualitative research was to discover the nature of the meaning of how incarceration affects the students. This was “an in-depth, field based study of a particular instance of the phenomenon known as cases” (Gall & Gall, 2005, p. 305). As part of the interpretivist inquiry methods, interviews were conducted with the students and data also were collected from unobtrusive methods such as journals kept during the study, report cards, and records of discipline actions and standardized test scores.

## **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to hear the voices of children whose parents are incarcerated about their perceptions of their own education and how their teachers, counselors, and/or administrators better could facilitate their learning in classrooms as it pertains specifically to their education. African American high school students were interviewed and asked questions regarding their perceptions of how their parent's incarceration has affected their educational experiences. The interviews were designed to elicit the students' perceptions of how having an incarcerated parent impacted their learning and educational environment.

## **Participants and Setting**

Participants were gathered from the researcher's knowledge of students whose parents were incarcerated. Another avenue of gathering participants was by "word of mouth" from teachers and counselors. Teachers and counselors may have had knowledge of students whose parents are incarcerated due to personal relationships with the students and were asked to give the names to the researcher.

This was a purposeful sample of African American high school students whose parents currently are incarcerated or have been incarcerated for at least one year during their high school experience. The goal of the purposeful sample was to select participants who will be "information-rich" with respect to the experience of being an

African American high school student and having an incarcerated parent (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005).

Selection of participants was made from recommendations by teachers, counselors and/or administrators who had knowledge of students identified as children whose parents are currently or have been incarcerated. Data were collected by interviewing African American high school students, whose parents are incarcerated or have been incarcerated for at least one year during the student's education from kindergarten to present, to discover students' perceptions about their parents' incarceration and how the children believe their parents' incarceration affected their schooling, and their home and learning environments. In addition to interviews, data were collected using unobtrusive data such as participant observation, and document and artifact review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The site for the study was an urban high school in the southwestern United States, Clean Woods High School, with approximately 3400 students (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2013). The majority of the students are identified as Latino (53%) and 29 percent of the students are identified as African American, and White students comprise less than 5 percent (TEA, 2013). Eleven percent of students are identified as English Language Learners (TEA, 2013). Approximately 70 percent of the students that attend Clean Woods High school are on Free/Reduced Lunch as indicated by being economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2013). Fifty-seven percent of students have been identified as "at-risk." This school was chosen because it has a larger percentage of

African American students than the overall state average. For the state, a little more than half of the students (51.3%) are of Hispanic origin, about 13% African American and 30% White (TEA, 2013).

### **Data Collection**

The interviews were recorded for accuracy and then transcribed. Tell how many interviews so readers are not wondering or confused. Some participants were uncomfortable with the recorded format and for those participants, field notes were taken. The researcher interviewed students outside of the school day during afternoons or weekends, whichever was more convenient for the participant. No interviews were conducted during the school day that interrupted class schedules. All interviews were at school. This contradicts the second sentence. Make this clear. The researcher made a conscious effort to keep the participants in their comfort zone. The meetings were between the participant and the researcher. The researcher conducted the fieldwork in the participant's natural settings as much as possible. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The students were given a journal to record any feelings or thoughts they may have concerning their parent's incarceration and schooling as those thoughts occurred. The follow-up on the journal was done during the second interview. Some how many? Secondary interviews were done by phone if student's were relocated and/or no longer enrolled at Clean Woods High School.

The researcher reviewed the data to find any common themes among students. After gathering information from the students, the researcher compared themes from all students in order to conduct the second interview lasting about half of an hour and consisting of open-ended questions based on the themes heard during the first interview. The researcher gained access to student records as a form of document and artifact review. During the second interview, participants were given the opportunity to look over their responses for correctness as a form of truth telling and member checking. In addition, the interviewer looked at the journal for additional information. Copies were made in cases where the participant wanted to keep the journal or the student was given the choice of giving the journal to the researcher. The time between the first two interviews was a minimum of one week, but in some cases, it was more than one month to six months. This gave participants time to journal and think of any other information they may have wanted to share. Originally, third and fourth interviews were outlined. However, they were not deemed necessary.

All participants were African American high school students who currently attend or attended Clean Woods High School. Five high school students were interviewed, three fifteen-year-olds and two sixteen-year-olds. Three students were female and two were male. At the time of their first interview, two participants were in the tenth grade and three were in the ninth grade. The researcher aimed to have six participants, but was unable to reach the sixth participant, as he dropped out of school.

### **Data Collection Protocols**

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher began the selection of participants from students that she already had been identified as children whose parents are currently or have been incarcerated. Teachers and counselors were asked if they had knowledge of students whose parents are currently incarcerated. Students were asked if they wanted to participate. The study was explained to the students and interview time and place determined. The students signed minor's assent forms and parents or legal guardians signed the parental permission form. This study began during the summer of 2013. Interviews were conducted outside class hours either during lunch and/or after the school day. No interviews interfered with classroom instruction. Interviews continued into the fall semester and ended January 2014.

### **Data Analyses**

Data were analyzed first by coding the broad themes that came from the data collection. The coding scheme was determined during and after the data collection (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). By reading the transcripts and reviewing field notes, the researcher gained broad themes that could be used to give educators insight into African American children of incarcerated parents. The use of *NVivo10* software also was used to facilitate the emergence of themes and subthemes. *NVivo* is software that supports qualitative and mixed methods research. The software program allows the user to easily organize and analyze unstructured information such as interviews and corroborating data



through a variety of formats. The researcher chose the spreadsheet format to organize the interview responses.

The researcher used the questions as broad categories and entered the transcribed data into the *NVivo* software spreadsheet (Appendix B) using the categories from the first interview questions were:

- A. Future Plans
- B. Impact of Incarceration on School
- C. Life Changes Since Parental Incarceration
- D. Teachers to Know
- E. Parents/Family
- F. School Experiences Related to Parental Incarceration
- G. Schooling Experiences (in general)
- H. Do Teachers Know
- I. Typical School Day

Next the researcher examined the various interview responses of all the students to further elicit similarities to code themes. From the vertical alignment of the spreadsheet various themes became eminently apparent. Themes emerging from the vertical alignment of the questions via the *NVivo* spreadsheet were “teachers don’t know”, long school day, plans beyond high school and family statistics, such as number of siblings, brothers and sisters, etc. Figure 1 outlines the overview of the preliminary coding process.

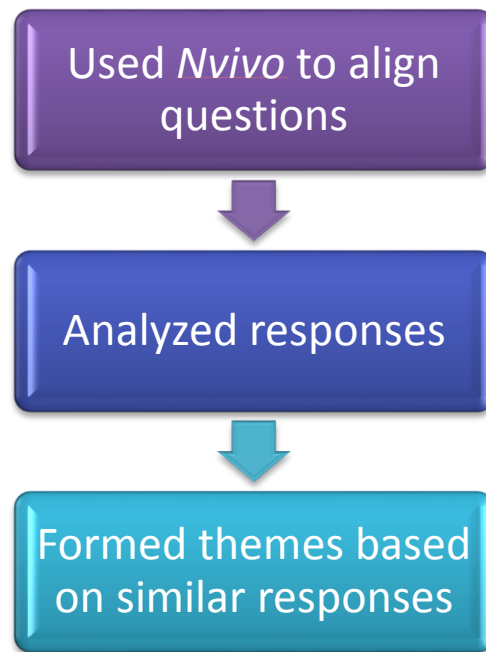


Figure 1: Preliminary Coding Process

By further analyzing the individual responses within the categories, the researcher elicited additional themes. Examination of the diverse participant responses indicated the children missed their incarcerated parents. In several of the responses the voices heard were expressly clear; while the parent was incarcerated, a void was left in the family. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Missing Piece

Within the responses another theme emerged – constant moving and instability of the family left behind by the imprisoned person. Only one of the participants resided in the same home they resided in at the time of the interview during the previous year. Additionally among the participants other themes surfaced. The children's replies revealed a multitude of emotions the participants felt from anger and abandonment to sadness and loneliness. When scrutinizing the overall responses and combining the difficulty unearthing participants, the theme of secrecy evolved. In the final analysis, after the many apparent issues faced by African American children of incarcerated parents materialized an equally significant theme appeared appropriate; how should a student focus on school with the plethora of mitigating factors which exist?

The researcher then began to formulate interesting titles for the themes. Each titled theme needed to be descriptive of the situation and voice heard through the participants. The titled themes needed to be appealing, yet simple enough for lay people to understand and result in a mental picture when the phrase was revealed. At the same time, the themed titles must be unforgettable, captivating and compel the interest of future readers and researchers.

After much thought and consideration the following major themes, from the view of the researcher, were appropriately entitled:

- MIA – Missing in action - described the void felt when a family member is imprisoned
- Shh...It's a secret described the shroud of secrecy existing when a parent is incarcerated.
- We're doing time too described the negative effects on children when a parent is imprisoned.
- Just keep moving described the instability and constant relocation African American students face when moving from one home or living environment to another.
- Can you feel me? Described the plethora of emotions felt by African American students when a parent is taken from their lives due to incarceration.
- You still want me to focus on school? Described the typical school day and the education African American children of incarcerated parents are instructed to

focus on while simultaneously experiencing the added trials occurring in their lives.

All of the above themes emerged directly from the data collected via interviews and artifacts. Credibility or truth-value was ascertained through structural corroboration. This was accomplished by spending time with the students during the interview, by observing students in their school environments and by gathering artifacts for review such as student report cards, journals and discipline records. To add credibility, some interviews were recorded and, once transcribed; the students were able to review the information for correctness. Finally, using the observations of the students, the personal interviews and the artifact data, the researcher was able to triangulate the data.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher completed a focused case study on African American high school students, whose parents are incarcerated. This study was conducted using interpretivist inquiry methods of interviews, observation and artifact data. The researcher began gaining a working knowledge of the perceptions of students whose parents currently are incarcerated, or have been, at least one year during their school tenure, and gained insight into strategies aimed at effectively instructing these students in, the future.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **WHO ARE THEY?**

This chapter is a detailed description of each participant and how they became a part of the study. As previously stated, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the minor participants. Demographic information was obtained via the interview process and through unobtrusive data from school records. The intent of this chapter is to provide voices to the five African American children and their experiences as it relates to parental incarceration. Each of the five participants has his or her own unique story which will be shared in the context of his or her resilience and strength as he or she reflects on managing realities.

#### **Meet the Participants**

This study began during the summer of 2013. Interviews were conducted outside the academic school day either during lunch and/or after the school day. No interviews interfered with classroom instruction. Interviews continued into the fall semester and ended January 2014. All participants were African American high school students who currently attend or attended Clean Woods High School. Five high school students were interviewed, three fifteen year-olds and two sixteen year olds. Three students were female and two were male. At the time of their first interview, two participants were in

the tenth grade and three were in the ninth grade. The researcher aimed to have six participants, but was unable to reach the sixth participant as he dropped out of school.

Two of the participants who were interviewed during the summer did not return to Clean Woods High School; therefore, secondary interviews were completed by phone. Of these two, one participant was difficult to locate and was not able to complete the third interview. The second participant dropped out of school and obtained a diploma via an alternative education program. Four of the five participants have an incarcerated father; one participant has an incarcerated mother.

This was a purposeful sample of African American high school students who had some experience with parental incarceration. One student was identified by his Chemistry teacher. Another student was identified by the counselor when the researcher asked if she knew any African American students whose parents were incarcerated. All other students were identified by the researcher, via self-disclosure.

The researcher, having been submerged in this case and recounting personal experiences with incarceration, will be referring to herself in the first person. As I am involved intricately with these students as a teacher and parental incarceration has impacted my own family, I have chosen to look at this data as an integral part of the research. I became a participant-observer. As a participant observer, I am able to increase the depth of the data and contribute to the thick description (Wolcott, 2001).

## Their Stories

In this section, I will give a brief description of the participants, how each participant became a part of the study, including my personal observations of each student. The description concludes with demographic information including their caretakers as a result of a parent's incarceration and their siblings. Each participant self-identified as African American and knew they were part of a study exploring their experiences as children affected by parental incarceration. Table 1 is a summary of the demographic data of the five participants.

Table 1  
*Demographic Data of Five African American Students*

Name	Age	Sex	Grade in School	Number of Siblings
Cinnamon	16	F	9	7
Sparkle	15	F	10	2
Toughguy	16	M	10	4
Manchild	15	M	9	12
Slim	15	F	9	2



## **Cinnamon**

### **Brief Description**

Cinnamon was a small-framed girl weighing about 130 pounds and standing about 5'4". Her cinnamon colored skin and variety of wigs endeared her to me. I taught Cinnamon Biology during the 2012-2013 school year, when she entered my class during the second six-weeks grading period. Many times, she would show up with a new look. When she showed up with a new hairstyle, as I shook her hand at the door, I would always reintroduce myself, as if she were a new student. She had a brilliant smile she would flash at me each time I did this. This daily interaction became our on-going joke.

Cinnamon's hairstyles changed frequently. Some days, she would wear a wig, other days, she'd wear her hair weaved, with different colors, lengths and various styles. Her wigs were as varied as her hairstyles, sometimes red and straight, other times blonde and curly or jet black and wavy. I never knew what to expect from her in that sense. But what I had come to expect was her easy smile and pleasant personality.

During the second semester, Cinnamon became a bit bold and decided to wear her hair natural in a short-cropped Afro, which she eventually dyed red. To this, I commented, "Hi, I'm Mrs. McCowan, and you are?" She immediately flashed that radiant smile and said, "I'm Cinnamon, Mrs. McCowan" as was our routine. To this, I responded, "No, you are the 'New Cinnamon,' a beautiful ray of sunshine. Welcome to Biology." This prompted an even larger grin. She seemed to have found the hairstyle she'd been looking for, because she wore that style until the end of the school year. She

had that same hairstyle when I saw her six months later, which solidified my belief that this hairstyle truly was “her.”

Cinnamon was enrolled in my class the second six weeks of the school year. She had just moved into the district. She came from another high school, from a neighboring school district.

As her teacher, I noticed that her attendance wasn’t stellar, and after missing more than two days or so, she would have to reintroduce herself, to acknowledge that her absence had been noted, and I would ask her to “account for herself,” which meant, tell me why you missed school. Many times, it was because she had to care for her younger brother, or her mother was ill. Sometimes, she admitted she stayed with her older sister and was unable to get back home in time to ride the bus to school. Frequently, this happened on Mondays or after long weekends.

Cinnamon was an outgoing, energetic young lady with a sparkling personality. She appeared to have above average intelligence, seemingly more matured than most of the other students in her classes. She did well on tests in Biology and easily passed her other classes despite having frequent absences. Cinnamon was sensitive, pleasant to be around and popular with her peers.

### **How I Found Out?**

Later in the school year, when we were talking during afterschool tutorials, I asked Cinnamon about her parents. She told me that she lived with her mom, but her father was in prison. This revelation put some of the issues that she had shared with me

earlier, in perspective. I asked her would she mind talking to me about her father's incarceration at some other time. She reluctantly agreed. From that point on, I noticed a difference in how she treated me as a teacher. She frequently would come by my room between classes just to give me a hug or ask how I was doing. It was almost as if we now shared "a secret." I believe that she was unsure, at first, how I would treat her after the knowledge of her father being incarcerated. She may have thought that I would have looked down on her or showed her pity. But once she saw that I did not look down on her or treat her differently, she began to open up. She let me know when she was not feeling well, or when other teachers "got on her nerves."

I knew that we had a unique bond the latter part of the second semester when she told me (almost in a whisper) that she was pregnant. When I asked her what she planned for herself and her unborn child, she stated she was going to keep the baby and take care of him or her. Honestly, I did not take the news well, and it obviously showed on my face, because she asked me, "Are you mad at me?" I told her that mad was not the emotion I was feeling; it was more of a disappointment, because being a mother is difficult at any age. I informed her that while I respected her decision, being a teen mother was a daunting task, but if anyone could make it work, I was sure she could. I'm quite sure that none of her other teachers knew this or even suspected her pregnancy. Even until the end of school, she did not "show" nor appear pregnant. Besides the occasional tiredness, she appeared to be the same as before. Her attendance was the same as before, perhaps missing a few more days due to morning sickness or being tired.

By the end of the school year when we finally sat down for the interview, it was as if we were just talking, having a conversation, per se. She did not appear uptight or nervous, because, I believe, she felt as if she could trust me with this information.

## **Family**

Cinnamon lived with her mother and, as far as she knows, her dad has been incarcerated for the last three years. She is the youngest girl of seven children. She has three sisters ages 30, 26 and 21 and three brothers ages 22, 20 and 12. At the time of the first interview, she lived with her mother and two brothers aged 20 and 12. Only she and four of her older siblings share the same father.

Cinnamon gave birth to a beautiful baby girl in November. She sent me pictures of the baby via email and text messages. Unfortunately for her family, she, her mother, her younger brother and the newborn were homeless again. Her mother had recently lost her job, due to an extended illness, where she had to be hospitalized. Without an income to afford housing, the family was forced to live in the car again.

During the Christmas holidays, I was able to share dinner with them on Christmas day through the kindness of my husband's parents. She arrived with her mother, newborn baby and her twelve year old brother. They ate and had conversation with my family as I sat and held the newborn. She was so tiny. My heart swelled as I contemplated what her baby's life would be like as a result of starting this way. Then seeing her mother come smiling, with that radiant effervescent glow, ceased my worry momentarily. The expression on Cinnamon's face while looking at her baby told me that

she was going to be okay. After eating, they talked more and fixed “to-go” plates for later.

The baby had only enough formula for one bottle, so I borrowed some formula from my nephew to give to her. My heart was aching thinking about them living in hotels and/or shelters during this time of year, especially, during the winter season when many shelters are full. I was concerned extremely over the baby, at just six weeks old, being out in the cold.

We walked them to the car, when her mother confessed that they had nowhere to sleep that night. This broke my heart. I talked with my husband, and we agreed to provide them with a room for the night. We looked for hours trying to find a suitable hotel within our tight budget. Eventually, we found one with a king sized bed and pull out bed for the three of them. It wasn’t the Ritz Carlton, but it was warm and clean. It had a microwave and refrigerator. Cinnamon confessed that many nights they had slept in the car. But through all of this, she still smiled. I found this to be courageous.

## **Sparkle**

### **Brief Description**

I also taught Sparkle Biology last year. Incidentally, she and Cinnamon were in the same class. Sparkle was a very attractive fifteen-year-old, with the skin tone of brown sugar and a personality as bright as the northern star. Sparkle stands about 5’2” and weighs about 115 pounds. She frequently wore hair weave, occasionally with

different colors. Her weave was always long and wavy, sometimes straight, but always a multitude of hues, including red, dark brown, light brown or any of the before mentioned colors together. Many times her clothes were fashionable, but sometimes a little too tight or revealing. A few times during the school year, she was forced into In-School Suspension (ISS) for dress code violation. If she did make it through the day, or if I saw her earlier in the day, with something out of the school's dress code, I would give her my sweater or tell her she needed to change into her gym uniform, which is required by the school. She usually would comply, but not happily. Sparkle is a nicely shaped girl and did not mind flaunting her shape.

Sparkle's schedule was changed a few times. She originally was in my class the last period of the day, a class that was full of students who had yet to learn "how to do school." By that I mean they were students who were rowdy and hard to settle down. Many of them spent days out of class for being suspended or "serving time" in ISS. The last period of the day in any school seems to be the most troublesome. Most times, students are tired and ready to go home, as are the teachers. I am no exception; my patience seemed to be a bit shorter at the end of the day. I have improved, and that class certainly allowed me to grow in that area. When her class was changed to an earlier period (due to leveling of classes during the second six weeks grading period), her grades improved. Previously, she was making average grades in the "C" range. After the move, she began to make grades in the "B" to "B+" range. Sparkle was never a

discipline problem, but she told me that she liked the new class better, “less bad people,” she commented.

As is my practice, I shake hands at the door to greet my students. In the beginning of the school year, I tell them that this activity allows them to assess me, to make sure I’m not in a bad mood, and it allows me to assess them to make sure they are ready to learn Biology. More often than not, students arrive ready to learn; however, since I teach adolescents, bad days most certainly occur. When students are frowning, sad, mad, and upset, etc., I usually know this before class and offer them a chance to get themselves together before beginning the learning process. This may consist of just having a seat in the rear of the classroom, going to the bathroom, or getting a drink of water. My expectation is that, when the bell rings, the students are ready to learn Biology and, for the next 45 minutes, that is our focus. However, we all are human and sometimes, things do not go as expected. Greeting at the door helps me to know if my students have had a bad day.

During the first semester and into the beginning of the spring semester, when I greeted Sparkle at the door, she was very pleasant. Although she was not an academically gifted student, she worked hard to understand Biology. If she did not understand, she asked questions and attended tutorials. Her test scores were low, but because she participated in class and completed the homework, she usually maintained a “B” average in my class.

## **How I Found Out?**

I noticed a marked difference in her behavior during the spring semester. Sparkle became extremely quiet and no longer worked or participated in class. There was a distinct change in her behavior. She was not engaged in the learning process, her homework grades dropped and her low test scores were even lower than normal. Sparkle's test grades were failing and her homework grades were nonexistent. Even daily grades suffered. She became sad and distant. One day during class, when she was supposed to be taking notes, I noticed she was writing a letter. I quietly walked by and asked her to get "on-task." She was upset, but compliant. After class, I asked her what she was doing. She said she was writing a letter to her stepdad because he was in jail. I told her that I was very sorry to hear that, and if she needed to talk, I would listen. She showed up for tutorials a few days later, mostly to complete her missing work before the end of the grading period, but we also had a chance to talk.

I listened to Sparkle and gave her some words of encouragement. I told her that I would be doing research about students like her who had a parent in prison and asked if she would like to participate. She said that she would. With the end of the school year quickly approaching, we agreed to exchange numbers and we would do the interview over the summer. After several attempts to schedule an interview with both her and her mother and juggling her dance team schedule, we were unable to meet. The interview subsequently was conducted during the fall 2013 semester.



## **Family**

Sparkle at the time of her interview, lived with her mother and 18-year-old brother. She had another brother aged 21 who did not live in the home. She was a part of the school's dance team, but during one of the interviews stated that she was going to quit because of "too much drama." Sparkle's stepfather has been incarcerated for the last two years. He had been a part of her life since she was seven years old. Her biological father currently was not a part of her life.

## **Toughguy**

### **Brief Description**

When I met Toughguy, he was wearing basketball shorts, high top tennis shoes and an athletic shirt. His dark chocolate skin directly contrasted the rare shy smile revealing perfectly straight teeth. Toughguy stands about 5'10" and weighs close to 180 pounds. Toughguy has rough exterior and walking tall and expressing an air self assuredness. To some, his approach may have been intimidating as his shoulders are squared and his back straight. As he walked in to meet me, he offered his hand but not his eyes. He tended to look down and avoided eye contact. As he talked, he had little eye contact, kept his eyes on the floor and shaking his knee. As the conversation continued, his eye contact increased, as the shaking of his knee decreased. I believed he only talked to me as a favor to Mr. Rollins. He seemed tense at first but relaxed as the initial interview continued.

Toughguy was very outgoing during the interview and seemingly the most willing to share about his experiences. His answers were detailed and I did not have to do much prodding, as opposed to the other participants, where I had to ask more questions when asked to detail a particular experience.

### **How I Found Out?**

Toughguy came to me after being referred by a fellow science teacher on the staff of Clean Woods High School. Mr. Rollins, who is from Louisiana, has been teaching Chemistry for six years and was relocated after Hurricane Katrina. Many of the students, who have had me as a teacher and then have Mr. Rollins, say that we have similar teaching styles. On the occasions that I have had the opportunity to work with him during meetings, I can see the basic similarity between the two of us. It is apparent to students that we both foster an atmosphere of caring in our classrooms. The principal of our school, Ann James, had asked Mr. Rollins to reach out to me last school year. Mrs. James thought we would work well together because we shared similar values. Mr. Rollins also worked in “Corporate America” before becoming a teacher. We have been able to work in several capacities on the campus and outside of school. He knew of my research topic and said that, if he came across any students, he would send them my way. I noticed Mr. Rollins had an excellent rapport with students. They respected him a great deal. This was evidenced by the many students who come back to visit him. In addition, he had very few discipline problems in this classroom and often helped other

teachers with their classroom discipline issues. I believe this is why Toughguy felt comfortable sharing his father's incarceration with him.

Mr. Rollins and I both taught an early summer session for students who needed to recover credit or remediate classes in which they were not successful. During the first week of the two week program, Mr. Rollins told me that he possibly had a student whose father was incarcerated. He said the student had shown him a picture that had been taken in prison, and he inquired as to who it was. When Toughguy replied, "my dad," Mr. Rollins asked if he wouldn't mind talking to a teacher about his situation, and he said "okay."

A few days later, Toughguy came to me during his lunch time. After seeking permission, his interview was conducted at the school. Toughguy, as reported by Mr. Rollins, is a very intelligent student, who had a few behavioral problems which caused him to have to attend the summer school session. Both Mr. Rollins and Toughguy attest to him being disruptive in some of his teachers' classes. As a result, he had to go to ISS a few times during the 2012-2013 school year.

### **Family**

Toughguy said he was a sixteen-year-old, tenth grade student, whose father currently was incarcerated. He lived with his paternal grandmother when the first interview was conducted, but moved to another city to live with his mother again, shortly after the preliminary interview. He has three sisters, ages eleven, ten and eight. His ten and eight-year-old sisters both live with his mother. His eleven-year-old sister,

whom he met within the last year, lives with her mother. They share the same father. Toughguy expresses his protectiveness of his younger sisters. He recalled how he felt when he saw his sister wearing some shorts that Toughguy felt were a little too short. He told his sister she had to change them. He also reported his protectiveness over his grandmother. Toughguy says he does not like for her to go out of the house alone at night. He tries to accompany her, even if it's a short distance, if it's late at night or after dark.

Toughguy's father has been incarcerated since he was in the second grade. His mother remarried, and he has had a stepfather, Austin. However, because of the abusiveness of the relationship between Austin and his mother, Toughguy was living with his paternal grandparents, but planned to move back in with his mother, since she was now separated from his stepfather.

Shortly after the interview, Toughguy moved to another city to live again with his mother. She planned to return to college and get a degree in either teaching or nursing. His mother had assured Toughguy that Austin, his stepfather, no longer would be living with them and she needed his help to care for his younger sisters, aged ten, nine and eight. Consequently, a follow-up interview could not be completed since the telephone contact given was no longer a working number. Due to the richness of Toughguy's first interview and his openness, his story is still included. His voice indeed needs to be heard.

## **Manchild**

### **Brief Description**

From the first day I met Manchild, ninth grader, I knew I was in for a treat. He is a charming, charismatic, young man who is full of life. He was very sociable and appeared to be well-liked by his peers. Usually, during the first day of school, many students are quiet, but not Manchild. He walked into my Dove's Landing class matching from head to toe in colors that accentuated his mocha skin and fiery strawberry blonde afro. He seemed confident and vibrant. Manchild has a six-foot-one athletic frame. Later, he would tell me that he was on the football team and, eventually, the coaches would move him up to the varsity football squad. His physically mature body sharply contrasts his fifteen year-old maturity level.

During the first two weeks of school, I found out that Manchild's father had been incarcerated. On one particular day, I asked him why he did not return some of the school forms that I had sent home with him. He replied that he did not go home the previous night. I thought he was kidding, but he was not. He said that he was locked out of his mother's house so he went to his grandmother's. Of course, I looked up the school contact information and called home. His mother said that she had signed the papers, and he needed to bring them back to school. She said that she would make sure he returned them the next day. After he did not return them the following day, I asked where they were. He said that his dad had them in the car. I said, "Then I need your dad's number." He gave it to me and told me to leave a message because his dad was in

court. Immediately a red flag went off, but I did not react. I simply called his father and asked him to return my call. He did return my call and said that he would drop the papers off at the front office before the end of the school day.

### **How I Found Out?**

Over the next few weeks, I noticed that Manchild's disposition had changed. He didn't seem as happy as he had been. I had him for Dove's Landing and the class period after, so I was able to observe him and form a relationship with him. So when I noticed his change in attitude, I asked him what was wrong. He, of course, replied, "Nothing, I'm just tired." So I probed further and asked how his dad was doing. He said, "I don't know, he's locked up again." I actually could see the pain on his face. I replied, I'm sorry to hear that, but I'd like to talk to you more about this at a time when you're feeling better. I allowed him to put his head down for the rest of Dove's Landing, after making him promise that he would be more alert for Biology. He was somewhat alert for Biology, but not his typical self. He was moved from my Dove's Landing class a few weeks later for "leveling of classes" again. But he remained in my Biology class.

Manchild and I had what I thought was a mutual respect, until one day during class in mid-October when we "butt heads." I had asked Manchild several times during class to put his cell phone up. Per school policy, students may not have their phones out during the day. They may use them until the morning bell for first period and after the last bell. He had had the phone out several times, apparently checking text messages. The first time, I gave him nonverbal communication as a warning to put the phone away.

The second time, I simply asked him to put the phone away. Near the end of the period, he had the phone out again, so I said in a very direct tone, “Put the phone away or I’m going to take it up and turn it in to the office.” His reply to me was, “No, you’re not going to take up my phone.” I was taken off guard and had to regain my composure. My reply to him was, “You have lost your mind talking to me this way. I don’t know who you think you’re talking to, but I ain’t the one!” (Yes, I used the word “ain’t.”) The bell to end class rang, and I asked him to stay after for a few minutes. He rolled his eyes, but made no attempt to leave. After class, I informed him that what he said was both disrespectful and rude, and I would be contacting his coach as well as writing an office referral. He got up and left without an apology, nor any apparent remorse.

I did indeed email his coaches and his assistant principal. Both coaches responded positively saying they would handle this in athletics, but wanted an office referral written because they believed that he needed to be held accountable for his actions. I talked to the coach a few days later and, apparently, I got off easy. Manchild had been disrespectful to three other teachers, one of which he cursed out, and walked out of class on another one. Within a time span of three and a half weeks, Manchild received four office referrals. He received no office referrals prior to this time and has not received any more since that time.

When I did take the office referral to the secretary, she stared at me, with her eyes wide open in disbelief, and commented, “You wrote an office referral?!” Then she read it and replied, “Well I understand why, but you rarely write kids up, so I’m a little

surprised.” She was entirely correct. I seldom write students up for discipline problems. At the beginning of the year, I tell students that I am their academic coach. I will treat them with respect, as long as I am treated with respect. And just like sports’ coaches expect for them to run laps, practice, or shoot baskets to improve their skills, I expect them to practice too, but our running laps and shooting baskets happen in class. Homework is our practice, and I expect that they will do their 20-30 minutes of practice daily, and yes even on weekends and holidays. And the bottom line in this process is that I want to be respected as we engage in academic strategizing.

Manchild returned the next day and apologized for his behavior. He said he understood why I had to give him a “write-up,” and he promised not to disrespect me again. I told him that I accepted his apology, and, in the future, if he needed to talk to me, I was willing to listen. I also told him if he ever needed a “time-out” or just needed a moment, even if it was during class, to let me know, and I would see if I could accommodate his request.

### **Family**

Manchild currently lives with his mother. The previous school year when he was in eighth grade, he lived with his father. He is the oldest of his parent’s children. He has two younger sisters aged seven and thirteen. They live with him and his mom. Including him, his father has eleven children. He is the only child his father and mother share. Manchild is athletically gifted. During his freshman year in high school, he was moved to the varsity football team and practices with the varsity basketball squad. If he



does not play varsity basketball his freshman year, he certainly will play and start during his sophomore year. He prides himself on dressing well and making sure he looks good every day. Manchild's interview took place during Dove's Landing in the teacher's lounge closest to my classroom.

## **Slim**

### **Brief Description**

Slim started out in my Biology class at the beginning of the school year. She spent three weeks in my class when, due to leveling, she was put in another Biology class, although her schedule was not changed. Slim is a very petite chocolate brown adolescent with bright, wide eyes. She was upset when her schedule was changed, but still came by my room frequently, at least two to three times a week.

During my morning duty, down the hall from my classroom, Slim, her brother, Roughneck, and a group of eight to ten other African American students would hang out before school. A few weeks into the year, she told me that her brother, Roughneck, also had me in a different class period. The two of them became my back-up during morning duty. If the other students were getting too rowdy and I had to ask them to quiet down, they would make sure other students cooperated. One morning in particular, a student whom I had not seen previously, continued to be rowdy after I'd asked the group to be quiet. When I went to talk to him, he became rude and disrespectful. Slim quickly told him, "Hey man, she's good people. Don't talk to her like that." Amazingly enough, the

student quieted immediately and apologized. This interaction told me two things; one, both Slim and Roughneck were leaders among their peers and two, their opinions mattered to the rest of the group.

### **How I Found Out?**

I never knew that Slim was impacted by incarceration until the counselor referred her to me. Since she was taken out of my class, the subject never came up. She was a very intelligent student, and learning of new material came easy to her. While in my class, she easily maintained between a B and B+ average. I did not know of any problems in the home until mid November, after making a parent contact for her brother, Roughneck, regarding poor grades and attendance. I talked to Mr. Smith, and was informed that he was the uncle and he had not seen Roughneck or Slim in a few days. Mr. Smith told me that he was kicking Roughneck and Slim out because Roughneck had broken all the windows out of his house and was doing drugs. He said that Slim had run away because he kicked out Roughneck, so as far as he was concerned, she was kicked out too. Mr. Smith did not know where they were staying and told me that he would be withdrawing both of them from school the next day because he no longer was their guardian.

When I saw Slim the next day, I asked her about all of this. She told me that they were staying with some friends, but that they were going to try to find someone else to stay with, within the school's attendance zone, in order to continue enrollment at Clean Woods High School. In short, she said that her uncle had been abusive verbally to both

of them and that's why they were leaving. Roughneck said that he hadn't broken out any windows, and his uncle was just "trippin'."

## **Family**

Slim currently lived with her 28-year-old sister. She recently moved in with her after previously living with Mr. Smith, her mother's brother. Roughneck, her seventeen-year-old brother, recently dropped out of school. Her mother was the incarcerated family member, although she did not know where her mother was at the time of the interview. She stated that, since she had been in school from kindergarten until now, she has never lived with her mother. She had mostly lived with her maternal grandmother, up until her death two years ago. Since then, she had lived with various relatives, her uncle being the last primary caregiver until she moved in with her sister. She acknowledged that she had lived with at least four to five different relatives since beginning school in kindergarten. Slim had above average intelligence and was usually a good student. She admitted that she did not attend school regularly, mostly because her uncle did not make her go. She mostly was left on her own. Ironically, her interview was conducted in the ISS classroom.

Slim moved before the end of the first semester. Her biological father assumed custody and was allowed to withdraw her from school. She was going to move out of the city to another suburb with her older sister. Her second interview was brief, but very informative. She seemed happy about the move.

## **Meet the Participants Summary**

Each of the students presented here, Cinnamon, Sparkle, Toughguy, Manchild and Slim, has a story that is uniquely their own. I will show common themes; however, how each participant contributes to that theme will be seen through what I believe is the participant's own lens. The themes and subthemes are explained in more detail and how each student is impacted on a personal level is explored. As I began to write, it felt natural to include within the themes and subthemes my own personal experiences as a teacher and a person whose brother is incarcerated for the past fourteen years

## **CHAPTER V**

### **WHAT DID THEY SAY?**

This chapter details the themes and subthemes found within the interviews with five African American children whose parents were incarcerated. The chapter presents the themes from data collected from this case study focused on African American high school students who have parents currently or previously incarcerated.

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, *NVivo* coding was used to ascertain different themes and subthemes arriving from the preliminary interviews. The first part of the analysis entailed using the *NVivo* software to identify possible themes and provide questions for the second interviews. By sorting the responses by the questions answered, several themes were elicited. Then the secondary interviews and follow-up questions were conducted to illicit themes and subthemes further based on the two interviews. The major themes and subthemes addressing the schooling experiences of African American students whose parents are incarcerated are diagramed in Figure 3.

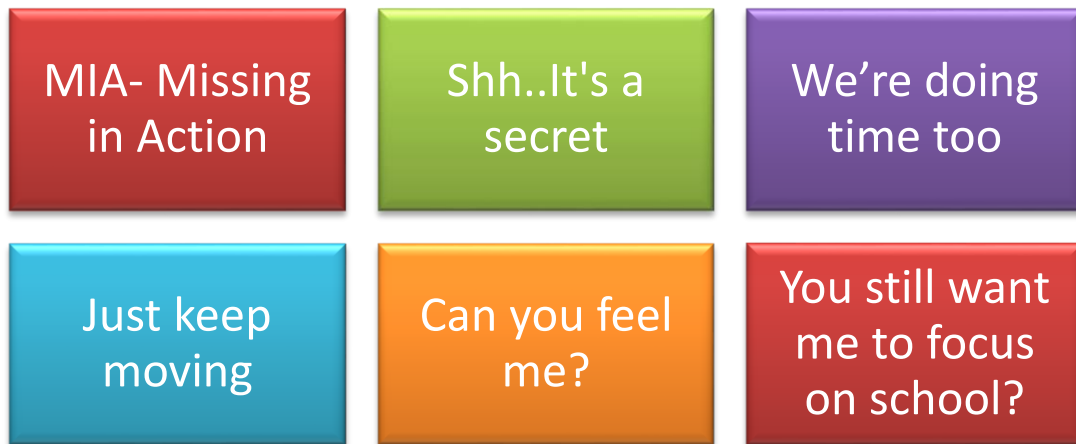


Figure 3: Major themes

The themes and subthemes are detailed further below.

- **MIA – Missing in Action** – describes the absence of the incarcerated parent
  - *How long have you been gone?* – length of sentence
- **It's a Secret We Don't Tell** – describes the shroud of secrecy and embarrassment about imprisoned family members
- **We're Doing Time Too** – describes the effects on the child when parents are incarcerated
- **Just Keep Moving** – describes the frequent relocations these adolescents may face
- **Can You Feel Me?** – describes the emotional aspect of African American students whose parents are incarcerated

- **You Still Want Me to Focus on School?** – the children of incarcerated parents in schools
  - *Typical school day* – describes the school day
  - *Difficult to Focus* – describes the difficulty students face remaining engaged in the learning process
  - *Not going to think about it* – describes the coping mechanism some students may use
  - *What they want teachers to know* – the information students with imprisoned parents want to share with teachers
  - *Looking to the future* – tells the students’ plans after high school

### **MIA – Missing in Action**

The first theme that emerged is the absence of the incarcerated parent. For all of these students parental absence has a profound impact, but is manifested in various ways. Although most participants felt that the absence did not affect their schooling directly, further probing by the researcher proved otherwise. Because, as Sparkle stated, “If you’re happy at home, you’re happy at school.” Each student’s voice was heard through the data collected during interviews. The voices are heard from the longest MIA to the shortest or most recent MIA. This topic and subsequent themes will end with how this subject is portrayed in my own family.

## **Slim**

Slim's situation was distinctive from the others because of her mother who has battled the criminal justice system. At the time of the initial interview, she didn't know the whereabouts of her mother. Slim's mother has been in and out of jail for her entire life. She knows her dad and where he lives. Although she doesn't know the exact address, she says that in the area there are "too many crack heads. All you see is crack heads." For her, both parents are missing in action.

She never remembers being with her mom. Slim stated that she's "been without mom 'since forever.'" She doesn't ever remember her mother being a part of her life. In early childhood, Slim lived with her maternal grandmother, until her grandmother died about two years ago. From that time, until recently, she lived with her uncle (Mr. Smith). Recently Mr. Smith forced Slim and her brother to leave his house. They were living with various relatives and friends until her half sister, Stephanie, her father's daughter, attempted to gain guardianship of her.

As of January 2014, Slim had been withdrawn from Clean Woods High School and was moving to another high school and school district. This change was made two days after the Christmas break, before the fall semester exams. This may have made it difficult for her to transfer grades because she would not have had final grades for the semester in order to obtain credit for the classes she had taken, if the new school has started a new semester. If the new school still needed to take exams, then she may have been at a disadvantage for subjects not covered at Clean Woods that had been covered at



her new high school. Either way, there will be some gaps in learning or other issues may arise from changing schools during this critical time in the school year.

### **Toughguy**

Toughguy misses his father. He's been living with a stepfather whom he described as abusive. He remembers when his father was not imprisoned. He remembers his kindness and the way he disciplined him without abusing him. Prior to the time of his interview, he said, "I hadn't talked to him since I was seven." The family moved to another city where his mother remarried Austin. Austin said, "that he was my dad, but I knew better. My name is Toughguy Charles Johnson, Jr. and his name is Austin."

Toughguy recalled when the school called his biological father, Toughguy, Sr. when he was in second grade. Toughguy, Sr. would talk to him and tell him how he needed to behave. He detailed that his biological dad's discipline was fair, but his dad did not include corporal punishment. Toughguy commented on how getting in trouble at school before his dad was incarcerated was different, "When I was in first grade, they would call my dad. He had a better way to talk to me. He didn't try to hurt me."

What Austin called a "whooping," Toughguy referred to abuse. Toughguy declared because Austin is the only male model that he's had, "A lot of my ways aren't good because I get angry a lot." Austin always wanted me to fight, saying that if I didn't fight, he [Austin] said that was going to fight me. He recounted an incident that

happened to him in elementary school while riding the bus home from school.

Toughguy said:

*“One day on the bus, another boy spit on the floor and put my bag in it. I didn’t do anything. The kids in the apartment complex where I lived were told (by my stepdad) that if someone hits Toughguy and he doesn’t hit back, ‘I’ll (Austin) give you five dollars to whoever tells me.’ So when we (Toughguy and the other bus riders) got off the bus, they all went to my apartment and told him (Austin). He walked me over and made me fight the boy from the bus.*

“Austin was not abusive to my sisters, only to me,” he said. He was very strict on my grades too. If my grades weren’t right, I got hit, but that hardened me. “It takes a lot to hurt me now.”

Toughguy and his family had moved back to the area to escape Austin. At the time of his first interview, he was staying with his paternal grandmother and her husband. He reported talking to his dad about three times a week while staying with his paternal grandmother and her husband. Prior to that, he hadn’t spoken with his father since he was seven. Toughguy missed his father and believed that if he had not been incarcerated, he would have never endured the abuse of Austin.

## **Cinnamon**

For Cinnamon, life changed drastically when her father went to jail. Before her father's incarceration, she lived in what she would describe as a stable two-parent home in an affluent suburb on the southwest side of the city. She's not sure how long her father's been incarcerated, but guesses about three years. She says that,

*"Most people have two parents they can go home to. Kinda' hurts I guess when you don't have one."*

After her father's arrest, she said that things went "downhill." Her mother was the only adult providing for the family when previously they'd lived in a two income household. Her mother was unable to pay the bills and the family lost the home where they were living. She and her family became homeless.

*"We were homeless, we would go house to house, sometimes outside. We had to sneak into a hotel room because we had no money for one more night to sleep there; before we had more...more income, more everything."*

Since she had no place to stay, Cinnamon missed a lot of school her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year during the second semester; from February 14<sup>th</sup> to the end of the school year, she did not attend school. Because of this, she had to repeat the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. State law mandates that students must be present in school a minimum of 90% of the school year.

Cinnamon said that she misses being able to get advice from her father. She commented that when you have a problem, "you only have one parent to go to. You

don't have two when you can get two different" opinions. Cinnamon's father was missing in two ways, his presence and his presents (income). He too was missing in action.

### **Sparkle**

Sparkle missed her stepdad. Although he was not her biological father, the two had grown extremely close. She confesses that since her biological father left, she's been hesitant about getting close to another male figure. She finally let her guard down and she and her stepdad became closer. Soon after she was comfortable with him being in her life, he was arrested. He's been a part of her life since the age of seven. She wonders if it's worth the effort to form relationships because, every time she does, they leave. She questioned,

*"Why does this keep happening?" Even when forming relationships with peers, she stated, "I don't want to be close to nobody. If I get close to a teacher, next year they won't be around."*

One positive may have been that in her stepdad's absence, she grew closer to her mother. Before her stepfather's incarceration, she was closer to him. She also said that if both parents are in the home, you are more focused in school. "If you're happy at home, you're happy at school." She positively believes that the absence of her stepfather affected her grades. When he was arrested, she reveals she had a slump in grades and didn't care about grades. School was the "last thing on my mind." She became quiet and introverted and admits she stopped talking to some of her peers.

Sparkle also stated that she didn't want to be bothered and didn't want to go anywhere.

She says that she felt bad,

*"It wasn't a good feeling."*

### **Manchild**

For Manchild, missing his father came in the form of a profound statement,

*"I don't hear him at the games anymore. Nobody there besides my mom."*

In this statement, he did not directly say that he missed his father, but the sadness in his voice told another story. This young man, as athletically talented as he may be, still needed to hear his father's voice cheering him on and coaching him from the stands. During the previous two years, his father was not incarcerated and the two began to form a relationship. He even began living with his father during his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year when his father was released from prison. They spent a great deal of time together doing various activities such as going to the race track, where his father raced horses or playing basketball. He revealed that his father "wasn't on me like my mama was." He provided for him by "buying him stuff" and allowed him more freedom than he had had previously with his mother. His dad would drop him off at the go-cart track to spend time with his friends. His father was there during his athletic events, cheering him on as most parents do. But now that voice is missing.

When asked why he moved back with his mother at the beginning of this school year, he responded,

*“Because he started tripping, selling drugs and getting caught.”*

When asked how life has changed since his parent’s incarceration, he stated that it had not. It’s been the same that his mother’s always been there so it’s not a big change. Important to note here, the four discipline referrals he received within the time span of three and a half weeks was preceded by Manchild’s father’s most recent incarceration. Although he did not believe that his father’s incarceration affected him, his classroom behavior and his statement referring to missing his father’s voice dictated the opposite. Manchild also said,

*“I’m not mad at him for not being there.”*

However the fact still remains, his father was missing in action.

### **My Family**

In my family, since my brother has been incarcerated, not only have his children missed him, our family has missed him. My parents and I miss his presence. Although we visit him regularly and receive letters and phone calls from him, those interactions do not replace him actually being with us, especially on holidays and other family events. Like Manchild’s father, he has fathered many children, six of them, with five still living. Three of his five children have never experienced him as a father outside of the confines of prison walls.

For his youngest son, his life began as a child of an incarcerated parent. And, at times, during his twelve years of life, he’s experienced the incarceration of both parents. My parents have been his primary caretakers since the second grade. Like Cinnamon,

due to multiple absences, he had to repeat first grade. Since being with my parents, he successfully has been promoted to the next grade each year. Having multiple absences during his first two years of school produced multiple gaps in learning, which are sometimes evident five years later. My brother is MIA and his son not only misses him, but needs him in his life.

### **How Long Have You Been Gone?**

This sub theme deals with the issue of the time away from the family. For most of the participants, the time has been sporadic, which means, the incarcerated parent may be in and out of jail frequently. As a facet of the absence, certainly the time away from the family may be problematic. The participants in this theme are ordered from longest incarceration (absence) to shortest.

#### **Slim**

For Slim, she doesn't remember ever living with her mother. Her mother has been in and out of prisons all of her life. She said,

*"I've been without my mom since forever."*

Slim says her mom "does bad things" like drugs and "illegal things" that make her go to jail. She tries to study more to forget about "those things" like her mother, so that she can make a better situation for herself.

Because of her mother's choices, Slim doesn't ever remember her mom being a part of her life. She lived with her maternal grandmother until she passed away two

years ago. Since then, she's lived with other relatives, most recently her uncle. The anger that she felt about this is apparent in her responses. Frequently she repeated,

*"I don't like my mom" or "I hate my mom."*

She believed that her mother has done "bad things" to make her go to jail, like drugs and other "illegal things." She seems to have used this absence as an incentive to do better. Slim convincingly shared,

*"I don't think my mom graduated so I think I'll be better...try to make a difference."*

For Slim, although her mother has not been incarcerated her entire life, the absence is just as real. Her multiple incarcerations have created a rift between the two of them.

### **Toughguy**

Toughguy had been without his father for the past eight years. He remembered when his father left him while he was in the second grade. For the past several years, he had been tormented by an abusive stepfather. He believed that his father's incarceration and his mother's marriage to Austin is the cause of him having to be at the hand of this abusive man.

During Toughguy's father's incarceration, his father has not been a part of his life. After his mother recently left Austin, he stayed with his maternal grandparents for a short time and then with his paternal grandparents. Once he began living with the



paternal grandparents, he found out that he had a sister who was a twin, but the other twin died.

Toughguy wanted his father to be home for the Christmas holidays, but his father was not. During Toughguy's last visit, he said, Toughguy, Sr., told him it was a six year sentence. Despite this, Toughguy commented that it's been six years already. He reported his father is incarcerated for "cheating white folk out of their money." The reality is his father is incarcerated for theft of a property greater than \$20 thousand and less than \$100 thousand (Texas Department of Criminal Justice Website). He has a twenty-five year sentence (TDCJ). He was eligible for parole on April 29, 2010, but his scheduled release date is December 29, 2017 (TDCJ).

### **Cinnamon**

Cinnamon was unsure of exactly when her father was incarcerated. At the time of the interview, she estimated at least three years. Prior to this time, she did not remember her father being absent from the family. Before the incarceration, she and her family lived in a prominent suburb of the city. She described her life then as stable, with more income and all of her needs were being met.

For Cinnamon, her father's presence wasn't in and out of her life. It was a sudden event. One day he was there and the next he wasn't. She was accustomed to having him there to talk to and spend time. She was able to confide in him, and in return, he gave fatherly advice.

When compared to the other participants, Cinnamon is unique in that she spent almost twelve years with her father before the sudden separation. She was still unsure of where her father was and when or if he would ever return. She admitted that, during school, she often thought about when he would come home.

### **Sparkle**

I watched the unfolding of this event for Sparkle. Her stepfather has been incarcerated for almost a year now. When he was first arrested, she was very sad and withdrawn. She couldn't concentrate on her schoolwork and even her appearance suffered. I could tell, as a teacher, that something had changed. She was no longer the bright, vibrant girl I grew to expect each day. Her grades suffered because she wasn't focused on school. It still bothered her when others discuss their dads at school.

Sparkle's biological father had not been in her life since the age of two. Her stepdad came into her life at the age of seven and their relationship was close. In some ways she said they were closer than she and her mother. He was a stable part of her life for the past seven years and then he was gone. Now, there weren't any daily interactions. She mostly was home alone in the afternoons. She preferred to stay after school in tutorials and ride the late bus home in the evenings, sometimes getting her back home close to 7:00pm. Then she said she had less time to be home alone and think about all the changes that were taking place in her life. In addition, she said most evenings her mother would go visit her stepdad in the county jail. She visited once, but "did not like seeing him like that."

## **Manchild**

Manchild on the outside and during the interview seems unfazed by his father's incarceration. He says that because his father's been in and out of prison for most of his life, the most recent incarceration does not affect him as much. Manchild estimated, on average, his father is in and out of jail on a five month cycle. Manchild said,

*"I don't think about him so it don't affect me."*

But in my opinion, when his father was not in jail, his attitude in classes and in athletic activities was much better. He seems to rely on his mother a great deal and describes her as always being there for him.

## **My Family**

My brother has been incarcerated for since 2000. Within those thirteen years he has been moved to various facilities. One was in excess of 500 miles and more than an eight hour drive away from my parents. And although this was difficult, someone still managed to visit him a minimum of once per month. This is not the norm for most families. It is expensive for a family to visit loved ones who are incarcerated when they stay so far away. Also, when inmates call home, they must call collect. They may not use a cellular phone; calls must be made via landline communication, which usually incurs expensive surcharges. One of the indicators of successful reentry into the "free world" is strong family ties. Increased distance from home and phone calls with excessive surcharges may impede family ties or sever them totally.

My oldest niece was angry when her father did not make parole the first time. She tearfully expressed, days before her high school graduation, “He said he was going to be here for my graduation.”

For all of those children whose parents are incarcerated, when asked “How long have you been gone?” the answer is always the same...too long, too long.

### **Summary – MIA**

Parental absence has a profound impact on children and families when a member of the family is incarcerated. The effect on children is seen through the eyes of these participants. Whether it is their voice missing on the sidelines, the loneliness felt coming home to an empty house or the void felt from loss of income, when a parent is incarcerated, a part of the household is missing.

### **It’s a Secret We Don’t Tell**

One theme that clearly comes across from the participant interviews is the notion of silence. These students do not tell teachers, counselors or administrators about their parent’s imprisonment. Incarceration carries with it a negative stigma that causes children to feel ashamed of their parent’s incarceration. Because of the shame and stigma, students feel as if they should keep their parent’s imprisonment a “secret” in order to avoid facing the potential embarrassment and shame. This leads to an unwritten code of silence. Overwhelmingly, the participants reported that the teachers, administrators, and counselors do not know their parents are incarcerated. When

participants were asked if their teachers know about their incarcerated family member, each of them responded “no,” with the exception of Toughguy, who reported that his Chemistry and Algebra teachers knew.

If a parent’s absence was due to military deployment or death, teachers would be informed by the counselor, and precautions would be taken to ensure the student’s success. Even in cases of divorce, teachers and counselors may be made aware of the change in family circumstances. This is not true of families affected by incarceration.

### **Cinnamon**

Cinnamon says that none of her other teachers know that her father is imprisoned. However, if she could tell her teachers anything about children like her she would say,

*“Not every child is fine. Not every smile [is real]. Someone can come to school with a smile, but you never know what’s behind it at home.”*

She was referring to how, shortly after her father was incarcerated, she and her family experienced a period of homelessness. They were living by sneaking in hotels and sleeping in the car.

During her follow-up interview, she recently had given birth, but the homelessness was again a problem. The shame and secrecy became evident as her mother described how she and Cinnamon’s father had “divorced.” Cinnamon was told by her mother to tell persons outside the family that their father had left them and divorced her. This proved to be untrue. When looking in the TDCJ database, it shows

where her father was convicted of sexual assault and is currently serving a four year sentence and is scheduled to be released June 9, 2014.

The shroud of secrecy that exists in this family is great. Cinnamon's mother has no problem sharing the fact that her family is homeless and she, her seventeen-year-old daughter, twelve-year-old son and six-week-old grandchild are homeless, but is ashamed of the fact her former spouse is incarcerated. This may be due to the nature of the crime committed, in this case sexual assault and failure to register as a sex offender. Added to the stigma and shame of incarceration, some crimes carry additional shame, especially those that are considered, "sex crimes." In the minds of some, being incarcerated for stealing food for your child to eat is not as bad as being incarcerated for child molestation.

### **Toughguy**

Although Toughguy disclosed his father's imprisonment with two of his teachers, he says that none of his peers know. He says,

*"It's not something you really talk about with friends."*

The shame and secrecy extends to friends and anyone outside the home. Very few people know that students have an incarcerated parent. It's not openly shared with teachers, administrators or even counselors. Of all of the participants, he was the most vocal regarding his father's situation. He had found some positives it seemed, since he said during his interview that he was "a lot like" his father in many ways, regarding Toughguy Sr.'s "trying to outsmart" white people. Toughguy appeared to have more

positive feelings towards his father, which may explain why he has not been as secretive about his father's imprisonment.

### **Slim**

Slim underscores the other participants' shroud of secrecy. She reports that only one of her friends knows about her mother. She says this friend knows because,

*"She's been my best friend for a long time."*

None of her other friends nor any of her teachers know the situation with her mother. The counselor recently found out, only because the uncle threatened to come to the school and withdraw her and Roughneck. For Slim, the secrecy may be due to the embarrassment of her mother's absence and the choices she has made.

### **Manchild**

Manchild states that, with the exception of me, none of his teachers, counselors, principals not administrators know of his father's incarceration. He says that some of his friends know, but they don't treat him any differently. I believe, as with Cinnamon and Sparkle, he may have felt uncomfortable divulging this to me, but once he found that I did not treat him differently or look down upon him, he was all right with sharing the secret. For Manchild and Sparkle, it was important that if the "secret" was shared, they were not treated differently, more especially not looked down upon, for their parent's decisions.

## **My Family**

If I am honest with myself, I, too, have some shame about my brother's incarceration. I definitely do not broadcast it, and it never comes up in "polite conversation." When people ask me about my family, I'm more than happy, even proud to say that my parents are college professors at a major research university and my children are smart and educated. I become uncomfortable when they ask the question, do you have any siblings? Because I know the next questions about where they live and their occupation follow. I can only imagine how it feels for a child to feel this way about a parent.

## **Summary –It's a Secret We Don't Tell**

In conclusion, very few of these students tell anyone they have an incarcerated parent. Perhaps it is due to the shame or stigma attached with incarceration, but the fact remains, we, as teachers, counselors, and administrators do not know who these students are and the students are not opening up to us to tell. The stigma associated with society's views of incarceration and those who have been incarcerated leads to shame. This causes the families, our families, to keep this a secret.

## **We're Doing Time Too**

When parents are incarcerated, their families are sentenced as well. Children miss their parents and are sworn to secrecy. Spouses and significant others miss their presence. Families are changed when an income that was previously relied upon



disappears and funds dry up. When mothers are incarcerated, children are more likely to have to move out of the home and separate from their siblings, especially if the siblings have different fathers.

### **Cinnamon**

Cinnamon has been adversely affected by her father's incarceration. When asked how life changed since her father's arrest, she says,

*“Downhill – Mom was the only one working and sometimes we had no place to go.”*

Prior to her father's incarceration, Cinnamon described herself as a “straight A” student. During the period of homelessness, she missed too much school and was retained because of absences. She had to repeat the eighth grade, which is why she was 16 years old in the ninth grade.

Because of her father's incarceration, Cinnamon is trapped in a life of poverty. Through no choice of her own, her basic needs of food and shelter are not being met. Without a home address, many services such as AFDC (Aid for Families of Dependent Children), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) are not available. Even if they are available, these programs are limited. Now that she also is a mother, she has to provide for herself and her child. This further traps her in a life of poverty. When her mother subsequently lost her job later, due to illness, this forced them further below the poverty level, again forcing them into homelessness, this time living in a car. She and her family were doing

time too - locked in a car as opposed to the cell the family's patriarch was experiencing. While her father was receiving three meals a day and a bed at night, she was scrounging for meals and sleeping in the car.

### **Toughguy**

Toughguy was imprisoned in a life of physical, mental and emotional abuse by his stepfather Austin. Although his parents were not married, at an early age, Toughguy, Sr. was still involved in Toughguy's life. When his father was incarcerated and his mother moved away from his paternal grandparents, he lost contact with his father and the only male role model he had left was Austin.

By losing contact with his biological father, Toughguy was forced into the imprisonment of abuse by his stepfather. He suffered many "whoopings" and other cruel and unusual punishments, such as forcing him to fight other children. Toughguy feels that Austin hardened him, making it harder for him to be hurt. At times, he was told that he wouldn't be able to eat unless he complied with his demands. In short, he was doing time with his father.

Without a father figure in the home, Toughguy figured he had to be the protector of his younger sisters. That trapped him in the role of father figure in the home. Caring for his younger sisters and taking care of them to help out his mother forces him to give up some of the freedoms and liberties afforded to other youth his age.

With Austin in the home, Toughguy is trapped in a life of abuse; without Austin, he's trapped in the role of father figure to his younger siblings. Either way, with

Toughguy, Sr. in jail, Toughguy, Jr. is trapped too. Toughguy, Jr. is serving a sentence as long as Toughguy, Sr. is incarcerated.

### **Slim**

Slim's life has not been directly affected by her mother's incarceration. When asked if her schooling experience has changed, she stated, "No it doesn't. I don't think about her a lot...she's nobody." Slim, because she had never lived with her mother, did not see a direct correlation between her educational experiences and parental imprisonment. But she did attribute her attitude in school to her mother's incarceration. She stated,

*"I get in trouble because I get angry and just snap. People make me mad. They do stupid things."*

Slim's time can be described as in "upheaval." She has been moved around constantly since she can remember. Her longest continual stay was with her maternal grandmother until her grandmother's death. Her grandmother told Slim about her mother being incarcerated and told Slim she didn't want to be in that situation, referring to be incarcerated. Slim's "time served" has been one in which she has been bounced around from one family member to another.

### **Manchild and Sparkle**

Both Manchild and Sparkle experience similar sentences because they both had fathers incarcerated during the school year. They both were close to their fathers prior to their arrest and recounted missing their daily interactions with their respective father

figures. Although neither of them missed school or experienced the upheaval of homelessness or having to change living arrangements, their sentences each began on the day of their fathers' arrest.

They are imprisoned by their own thoughts and not being able to focus. Manchild lost his focus on athletics temporarily, because he could not "hear his ...voice" cheering him on, and coaching him from the sidelines. Sparkle was not able to focus in school and her grades dropped due to lack of focus.

### **My Family**

As a family, we are "doing time" too. We are not able to see our loved one when we would like. We have to visit in confined places while being watched. My parents have been sentenced to care for grandchildren when they should be enjoying the freedom of an "empty nest." But more importantly, his children are "doing time too." By not having the resources he would have provided, had he not been in prison, their lives could have been much richer, enriched by his presence as well as economic resources.

### **Summary – We're Doing Time Too**

Families are sentenced when prisoners are sentenced. The students in this study are all "doing time too." Each in their own way, they are serving time along with their parents. The absence of a parent caused missing income and resources - it allows for step parents or others to become caretakers or it can lead to shame and secrecy, but all of these are sentences that the students themselves must serve while their parents are incarcerated. The change in familial circumstances often causes the family to relocate,

especially when the parent contributed significantly to financial resources supporting the family. The next section will discuss the next theme – how students whose parents are incarcerated must keep moving around.

### **Just Keep Moving**

When parents are imprisoned, it is likely that families will have to relocate. When mothers are incarcerated, their children are more likely to live with a close relative, most often the maternal grandmother. When fathers are incarcerated, children usually remain with the mother. Children of imprisoned parents tend to move around more frequently than other children. Their lives become unpredictable and unstable. This shows up as undulating attendance for some students and frequent changes in school for others.

Constant moving around can be detrimental to students, especially when moving to different schools and different home environments. With the exception of Sparkle, all of the participants have had to move or relocate because of their parent's incarceration. This theme is arranged from the participant most affected to the least affected. It does not include Sparkle, as she has not had to move. This is measured by the amount of disruption detailed by the participant and my observations.

### **Cinnamon**

Movement has been the new norm since her father's incarceration. Her once sedentary life has been plagued by homelessness. Last year was her most stable year

since his imprisonment. However, she finds herself between stable housing again. Her constant movement has impacted her education. Having to repeat a grade was a huge setback, but she's since completed her high school diploma by going through an alternative high school, which is a positive. Cinnamon's mother is now depending on her to begin college classes so Cinnamon can receive federal financial aid, which will provide monetary resources to help support the family. Now Cinnamon has turned into her family's provider. But she has to keep it moving.

*"Sometimes we had no place to go... We were homeless, would go house to house sometimes outside."*

### **Slim**

Slim seems to be the most unstable in comparison to your other informants. Early in life, she stayed with her maternal grandmother as most children whose mothers are incarcerated do. She and her brother have different fathers, but the same mother. They lived with her grandmother until she died about two years ago. After that, they lived with her mother's brother, their uncle. Slim says that she's moved at least four to five times since she began school. Most recently she's moved in with her half-sister (they share the same father). She states that she likes it there. Her sister is more concerned about her education and makes her go to school.

Less than a month later, Slim was moved out of the Clean Woods High School's school zone and district. She will now attend a new school in a new school district in the middle of the academic year. She will still be living with her sister and her family.

When she lived with her uncle, she said she didn't always have to go to school. Since he left the house earlier than she and her brother, they would go to school only when they wanted to go. Their attendance was poor. If Roughneck wasn't in class, I would ask Slim where he was when she came by my classroom. She'd usually say that he didn't feel like getting up; consequently, she left him. She admitted to me earlier in the school year that sometimes they don't come to school. She promised me that she would do better next semester if I had her moved back into my class. That, of course, would never happen, since she's moved to another new school.

### **Toughguy**

Within the last year, Toughguy had moved from living with his mother and stepdad, to living with his maternal grandparents, to living with his paternal grandparents and is planning to move again back with his mother and sisters. This may cause gaps in his learning, which may be why he had to repeat some classes during summer school. Although he will be returning to the school he attended before, adjustments still must be made. So, in the previous year before the interview, he's moved three times and was anticipating another move when the interview took place.

*"We're moving back to [the city we lived in before here]. We'll be in [a nearby city] for about a week and then we'll move to [the city we lived in before here]. My mom's going to be going to [college] to finish school to be a teacher. When she finishes, she wants to back to get a nursing degree. We moved here because she left Austin. Then she took him back when he moved here. We're moving*

*back but Austin is not going with us. I need to go help my mother take care of my three little sisters.”*

### **Manchild**

Although Manchild is currently in a stable environment with his mother, he was with his father for a short period of time. During that time, he lived with his father and his paternal grandmother. He moved from his mother’s house to his grandmother’s and then back to his mother’s. His comment about the move is that life hasn’t changed since his father’s incarceration. His stability has always come from his mother.

*“My mother’s always been there so it’s not a big change.”*

Providing Manchild with consistency has worked in his favor. He’s been able to stay in the same school district and has excelled in sports because he’s been able to stay in one place long enough to practice and improve his skills. His accomplishments in sports coupled with the stability provided by his mother, allows Manchild the opportunity to excel, possibly to the next level, in sports.

### **My Family**

My brother’s incarceration has led to moving around numerous times for each of my nieces and nephew. His youngest son moved around frequently and because his mother was not able to care for him and take him to school regularly, he had to repeat the first grade. Since then, both of his parents’ parental rights have been revoked and he has been placed permanently with my parents. In this case, his environment became more stable.



Unfortunately, his is not the case for some of his siblings. In particular, his oldest sister, during her secondary schooling, was bounced from her mother, to my parents, to living with me and then back to living with my parents. She has lived in at least three different cities and attended numerous schools. She graduated from high school and attended one semester of college, but did not complete the year due to an unplanned pregnancy.

Another of my nieces has two other sisters (who have different fathers). They currently live with their maternal grandmother. They have moved back and forth from living with their mom to living with their grandmother. They have lived in two different states and several cities over the past twelve years. But this has seemingly not affected their matriculation process. One of my niece's sisters did graduate from high school last year, and my niece is projected to graduate on time. However, my niece has had discipline problems in school.

### **Summary - Just Keep Moving**

Frequent transitions during school can be detrimental to students' educational success. The participants in this study have had significant disruptions in living arrangements. For some, more than others, it has affected their education. The participants with less disruption in moving, more specifically schools, seem to have the better outcomes with grades. However, the bottom line is that many children of incarcerated parents just keep moving.

## **Can You Feel Me?**

From the absence of a parent, to frequent movement, to changes in caretakers, each of these causes some emotion. Suffice to say then, having these varied experiences, children whose parents are incarcerated go through a variety of emotions, from sadness, anger, and grief, up to and including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The participants in this study are no different. They express an array of emotions. Each of them expresses some emotion, and are not to be limited to just one, but a myriad of feelings that may occur at any given time. Although only three emotions are discussed here, there may be an infinite number of times and ways these students feel these emotions throughout a day. In the school setting, teachers may see these emotions and are unclear how or why the student feels this way.

### **Hate**

For me the most difficult interview to conduct was with Slim. She repeatedly said,

*“I hate my mom.”*

While I understand her frustration, being that her mother has never been her caregiver, it really weighed on my heart each time she said that. I cannot imagine carrying that much “hate” around each day. She went on to say,

*“I don’t think about her a lot...she’s nobody.”*

It's no wonder she has outbursts with her teachers, especially those who are female. On the day of her interview, she was in ISS because she cursed a teacher. Her emotions got the best of her and she was angry. She said,

*"I get in trouble because I get angry and just snap. People make me mad. They do stupid things."*

Her hatred for her mother spurs her to do better in school. She revealed,

*"I try to make better of the situation and try to be something much better. Parents not being there helps... I have my brother and my sister. I don't think mom graduated, so I think I'll be better. Try to make a difference."*

As I listened to her, I couldn't help but think how it must be to hate the very person who was responsible for your existence. Being a child and having children, my personal experience with the mother-child bond has been different than Slim's. My mother was my primary caretaker for my formative years. As I reflect, as a teenager, I went through the "I don't like my mom" stage, but never had the intense hate for my mother that this young lady possessed. As I grew into an adult and had children of my own, I began to realize the sacrifices that mothers make for their children. I also saw the love my children had and still have for me. I can see the love I had and still have for my own mother. So hearing her fervently repeat how much she hated her mother was emotionally heart wrenching.

Slim's emotions were raw and painful. Each day she brought her hatred, pain and anger into a classroom. Teachers are going about their daily routines of teaching

and this child is sitting in the classroom sending mental darts at them because she carries around such deep seated hatred for her mother. The separation and the empty space that's left after her mother's absence, then her maternal grandmother's death left great voids in her life, which she seemed to have filled with hate and anger.

### **Anger**

Toughguy was angry, but he was not angry with his father. He was angry with his stepfather for the way he treated him. He feels as if he's angry because anger is the emotion most modeled by his stepfather, Austin. He stated,

*"I have a lot of anger inside."*

He admits that he "catches tempers quick" and does not really know how to control his anger. He said that, for him, not being able to let a subject go or yelling at him triggers his quick temper. He further explained it this way,

*"Yelling at a kid like me is not a good idea. Some kids don't know how to control their anger. If someone explains their situation, just listen and not say what you think, like my grandmother is always saying she knows how it was with [my stepdad], but she really doesn't."*

Anger is often felt by children of incarcerated parents. They usually are angry about the loss of a parent or the change in circumstances, for example, living arrangements, which result of their parent's incarceration. In this case, Toughguy was angry about the change in circumstances that his father's incarceration has caused.

## **Sadness**

From both Cinnamon and Sparkle, there was a great deal of sadness. This was shown not so much in their dialogue but in their demeanor. When talking about the incarceration of their parents, their tone, body language and facial expressions, all showed an intense sadness.

As Cinnamon recalled the homelessness, her voice quieted and speech slowed. She looked down and avoided eye contact. The smile that was ever-present was missing when we talked about her father's incarceration and the aftermath. Even during the follow-up interview over the phone, there was a sense of sadness that lingered throughout the conversation, verified by her tone and quiet voice. During her recent homeless event, Cinnamon still tried to remain positive and forward facing. When I saw her on Christmas day, she still had that award winning smile and beaming with joy. Although there was a veil of sadness when she left, at least for the moment she had some joy. She was able to eat a hot meal and be warm. As she left, she smiled, but there was still a lingering sadness in her eyes, not knowing where they would sleep that night was bothering her.

Sparkle's sadness played out for me during the course of the school year. Seeing her walking with her head down and not taking care of her physical appearance were significant indicators of her sadness. Almost a year later when we did our face to face interview, the sadness was still there as she talked about not wanting to get close to anyone, peers or teachers, because she felt as if they would leave her.

*“If I get close to a teacher, next year they won’t be around.”*

For Sparkle, dance has been her outlet. When she was dancing, she did not think about her stepdad not being there. Being a part of the school’s dance team was a positive for her. Making the dance team last year was a major accomplishment for Sparkle; it gave her hope and a place to put her focus. In addition, being a part of the dance team means that she has to keep her grades up, which gave her reason to prioritize her schooling and education.

Manchild was hiding his feelings. He pretended as if his father’s incarceration did not bother him. But the depth of his sadness rested in his own words,

*“I don’t hear him at the games anymore.” Although he said, “It doesn’t bother me at all. It’s his business...he’s only been there for like 8<sup>th</sup> grade year.”*

This says to me that even though their relationship was formed over the last two years, he loves his father and misses his presence.

### **My Family**

I have watched each of my nieces and my nephew “act out” in numerous ways. They miss their father, even those who have never known him outside of prison walls. It seems my nieces are continually looking for that man to give them unconditional love, only a father can provide. The eldest of my nieces will have her second child as an unwed mother, before she is legally able to purchase alcohol or rent a car.

### **Summary – Can You Feel Me?**

Emotions play an important part in education. We may say that how we feel doesn't matter, but it really does. For these students, carrying around this emotional baggage can interfere with learning. These emotions may cause the students to lose focus and become distant during class time. All too often, adults aren't able to deal with the multitude of emotions these adolescents face. As educators, we're asking them to leave all of this at home, if they have one, and come to school ready to learn.

These students are not prepared mentally to detach themselves from the emotional baggage they carry with them. The anger, hostility and sadness may creep in at any given moment. Those emotions may cause students to react in a way that causes them to receive negative consequences. It is difficult to focus on learning a new math or science concept when focused on the anger and hostility felt by the absence of an incarcerated parent. Cinnamon stated this:

*“Sometimes I come in with a bad attitude [and] get off track.”*

### **You Still Want Me to Focus on School?**

It is evident that these participants each face a myriad of issues from missing parents, secrecy, constant relocation, and emotional trials. However, we, as teachers, administrators and counselors, still want them to come to school, focus and excel in the classroom.

This section begins with the typical school day for these students. It discusses some of the ways these students cope with parental incarceration in the classroom and ends with their future plans. Most important, their voices are shared to highlight the challenge of focusing on school.

### **Typical School Day**

Each student during their interview described getting up at 5:30 each morning and catching the bus to school. The bus comes for most of these students around 6:20 am. Free breakfast is available for all students at Clean Woods High School. Most of the students eat breakfast at home and only eat at school when they are running late or the cafeteria has something they like. For most of them, they prefer to have the morning as social time with friends.

Clean Woods High School is on a seven period per day schedule with a thirty minute homeroom (Dove's Landing) after the second period of the day. The school day begins with the first bell at 7:15 am and the first class starting at 7:25 am. School ends at 2:25 pm. For Manchild and Sparkle, participating in extracurricular activities such as dance team and athletics means that their school day is extended by practice until 5:00 pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. There is an activity bus available for all students on the aforementioned days which leave between 5:15 and 5:30 pm. Students taking this bus may get home as late as 7:30 pm. All of the participants spend the majority of their day in school.



For students participating in extracurricular activities or afterschool tutorials, the day is lengthened significantly. These students may spend up to thirteen hours away from home. On Fridays with athletic events such as football or basketball games, students can expect to have a much longer day. Most games are local but, when traveling out of town, students may not get home until well after midnight.

### **Difficult to Focus**

Sparkle said that she found it difficult to focus on schoolwork when her stepfather was first arrested. She said:

*“I wonder how he’s doin’ ...you know is he okay?”*

But, as time went on, she got used to it. This was evident as I watched her decrease in class participation during my biology class. She said during her interview:

*“I wasn’t focused in school. My daddy wasn’t there.”*

Cinnamon admitted to thinking about when her father is coming home during the school day. I suspect that not knowing where you will be sleeping at night could make it difficult to focus in school as well. Not being able to sleep at night also would cause students to be sleepy and tired during the school day, which also leads to decreased ability to focus. She said:

*“I think about when he’s gonna come home.”*

Both Sparkle and Cinnamon described a drop in grades and interest in school due to parental incarceration.

## **Not Going to Think About It**

Manchild did not believe his father's incarceration affects him at all during the school day. He pretended as if he doesn't care and blocks out his feelings to cope. Instead, he "acts out" by being disrespectful to teachers. Although he may not admit to thinking about it, his actions are speaking louder than his words. By acting out or getting into trouble in school, right after his father's arrest, Manchild was showing that he really missed his dad.

Slim used the negative feelings for her mother to motivate her to do better. She said,

*"I study more and try to forget about those things and make better of my situation."*

However, the burden of hate that she carries around each day is expressed as she is disrespectful to female teachers, telling them to "Shut up!" She also became physically aggressive with a teacher, pushing the teacher out of her way, when the teacher told her she could not leave the classroom. Incidentally, this teacher is an African American female, perhaps reminding Slim of the mother she "hates."

## **What They Want Teachers to Know**

Toughguy wants teachers to know they should be careful how they talk to students. Give the direct quotes. Try not to yell at them because you don't know if that kid is going to "blow up." He said that it is difficult sometimes to control his temper, especially when adults aren't able to "drop a topic." If he's mad, then he prefers to just

stay mad. He said he needs time to cool off and then he is better able to deal with the situation and think more calmly and rationally. When asked what he wanted teachers to know about students like him, he responded:

*“I catch tempers quick. Yelling at a kid like me is not a good idea. Some kids don’t know how to control their anger.”*

Also, Toughguy said that he wants teachers to listen; he said if students “explain their situation, just listen and not say what you think.” He said that someone may think they know your situation, but they actually do not. So just listen to the children.

Sparkle reported she doesn’t want to be treated differently, which was why she did not disclose her father’s incarceration. She also advised teachers to listen, but in a different manner, she said,

*“If students seem unfocused, try to talk to them to see what’s going on.”*

Manchild, in contrast, did not want teachers to know anything. He doesn’t want to be treated differently because he insists that the incarceration doesn’t bother him. Like Manchild, Slim said she did not want the teacher to know anything. These students feared being treated differently because of their parent’s decisions. They did not want to be pitied or singled out. They would rather be accepted by their peers and “fit in.”

Cinnamon suggested teachers should be mindful that sometimes, projects or homework may not get done right or at all.

*“When you’re living in a car, it’s hard to do your homework or finish a project.”*

It was not because the students were not trying, or did not want to do an assignment, but there may be another reason why we did not get it done. She's specifically speaking to her own situation when she was homeless. I imagine it would be very difficult to do homework without a home.

All of the students were quiet about their parents' incarceration, it appears to be up to the teacher to focus and listen. Students want you to get to know them as people, as individuals. Students do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

### **Looking to the Future**

Interestingly, all of the participants reported that their plans after high school had not been changed due to their parents' incarceration. Although each of them reported that their lives changed after their parents' incarceration, they all had future plans that were not affected. None of their future plans include incarceration, nor do they include illegal activities. They still believe their future to be positive in spite of any negative consequences they've experienced. Table 2 details each participants' plans after high school.

Table 2:

*Future Plans after High School*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Plans after High School</b>
Cinnamon	Cooking School or Beauty School
Toughguy	Marine Corps and then College
Sparkle	Beauty School or Homicide Detective
Manchild	Oregon College to play football and basketball
Slim	Attend Louisiana State University –become a music producer or lawyer

### **Summary of Results**

The schooling experiences of African American students whose parents are incarcerated are complicated. The impact of a missing parent is revealed in numerous ways. From the silencing of their parents' voices in the home, at school activities, or their missing income, to not having an extra opinion, these students miss their parents. Even when they refuse to acknowledge their feelings, the absence is still real. No matter how long they have been gone or if they are in and out of their lives, the absence manifests itself in their lives and in their schooling.

The secrecy of incarceration becomes the "elephant in the room" for many of these teens. Many of their experiences can be attributed to their parent's incarceration,

but that secret cannot be revealed or shared with anyone outside the family. It becomes taboo and never discussed in public or in the home as if the absent parent stopped existing; it goes as far as to have the child tell others that the parents are divorced and no longer together.

Often times, families are sentenced to do time along with the incarcerated family member. They may be imprisoned into a life of poverty and homelessness due to the loss of income. Another may be sentenced to the abusiveness of stepparents or family members, who are ill-prepared to deal with an interruption of their life to care for the child of an incarcerated family member, be it their brother, sister, son, or daughter.

The constant relocation and moving often caused these students to miss an enormous amount of school. This results in gaps in learning and in the severest of forms, loss of credit or the inability to matriculate to the next grade. The gaps in learning may cause students to fall behind academically, not being able fully to understand concepts that are important to passing standardized exams also needed to progress in school.

The emotions experienced by African American students whose parents are incarcerated run deep. These students are angry, full of hate and sad. This may cause them to misbehave in the school setting often misdirected at teachers who know little and may care even less about their situation.

With the negative experiences caused by their parents' incarceration, educators continue to expect these students to come to school prepared, excited and ready to learn

each day. These students tell us that this may be difficult some days. They need for teachers to listen, but not judge them by their parents' actions.

The next chapter will analyze these results and give suggestions as to how educators best can serve these students who are most “at-risk” for being those in the system who are “left behind.”

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter begins with a review of the results as they pertain to the theoretical framework and review of literature. Secondly, a synopsis and discussion of the outcomes are presented. Next the recommendations for future practice and research and limitations of the study are discussed. This chapter ends with a summary and conclusions of the research.

The study was designed to explore the schooling experiences of African American students by interviewing the students and give insight to educators as to how they best may serve this unique population of students. The two research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the schooling experiences of African American students whose parent(s) are incarcerated?
2. How has the incarceration of a parent(s) affected the school experience of African American students?

I will discuss the experiences of African American students whose parents are incarcerated, what they are saying and what I consider educators should do to help these learners be successful. The following segment refers to what I believe these students are articulating.



## **Relationship to the Theoretical Framework**

### **Attachment Theory**

In the theme missing in action, it is evident that children of incarcerated parents miss their parents. The impact of the missing parent is ongoing and may be thought of throughout the school day and is felt intensely when students leave the school to depart for home. These thoughts can cause loss of focus, which can hinder the learning process. In addition, the absence of a parent corresponds with Bowlby's attachment theory, one of the theories undergirding this research. Although Bowlby's theory is said to have been felt more dramatically during infancy and early childhood, not being attached to a parent also may resurface during later stages of life.

I propose this is especially true of Slim. Because she missed that attachment stage with her mother during infancy and childhood, she has problems controlling her emotions. During her tenure at Clean Woods, Slim's outbursts were directed particularly at African American women. Perhaps she is transferring the anger and sadness she feels from the loss of her mother in her life to these women. In addition, at times, when she has been frustrated by her housing situation, especially during the turmoil with her uncle, she "acted out." A teacher not understanding her situation may inadvertently have pushed buttons that caused Slim to become increasingly angry and belligerent.

Toughguy's attachment to his father was formed during his early childhood years, but that relationship was interrupted abruptly when his father went to prison when

he was in the second grade. The father figure was replaced then by an abusive male which has fostered feelings of resentment and anger to build up inside of Toughguy. He only plays the “tough guy”. Inside, I believe there is a very hurt little boy, who is disappointed by his father’s absence and disgruntled by the replacement father figure.

Cinnamon and her family were able to remain together after her father’s incarceration, making the attachment issue a nonfactor. She has formed an attachment with her mother and seemed to be forming a relationship with her newborn baby.

Manchild has maintained an attachment with his mother and it is evident that he depends on her to be there. His mother has been there for him and is the backbone of their family. With the in and out appearance of his father, the attachment to Manchild’s mother has provided him with stability. The appearance of his father later in life, gave their relationship a different attachment. Manchild knew who his father was and they formed an attachment relationship, but he also realized that the attachment could not be to the point where he would miss him substantially, should his father ever have to leave again. In the future, it may be hard for Manchild to form bonding relationships with other males in a father/son capacity, or he may want to replace that relationship bond with another male, perhaps a teacher or a coach.

Sparkle’s attachment issues are proven through her comments regarding not wanting to get close to anyone. She felt like getting close to people was not a good idea since from her previous experiences; the relationships did not last long. First her biological father was not in her life, and then her stepfather was arrested is not a part of

her life. She remained resilient and continued to do her best in school. She maintained her grades and was on-track to graduate high school on-time and achieve her goal of becoming a cosmetologist.

In my own family, my nieces and nephew miss their father. Our family misses him. At holidays and family functions, he is missing. An important part of our family is missing. We attempt to fill in the gap left by his absence with his children; however, as we fulfill the various roles in our own immediate families, we fall short. The immense gap left by his void is difficult to fill, especially as it pertains to his place as the patriarch in five households.

The theme missing in action correlates with the attachment theory because these students are missing a very important part of their affectionate relationships. citation

### **Risk and Resilience**

Risk and resilience citation is the other theory supported by this research. These theories tell how risks can foster resiliency of adolescents when adverse conditions produce positive outcomes. Each of these students has faced multiple risks, yet they are resilient. They continue to produce positive outcomes. The fact that they are still continuing their education is, in and of itself, a positive outcome.

Slim's resilience is elicited as she continues to matriculate and progress in school despite exposure to multiple risks to which she has adapted. She has chosen to use her mother's absence as a catapult to achieve more than she feels her mother was able.

Toughguy had to develop a sense of resilience in order to deal with the abusiveness of his stepfather. His resilience and resolve are shown when he went back to live with his mother, but only after she assured him that Austin was no longer a part of the household. His resilience is evidenced further in his future plans to join the Marine Corps and eventually attend college. He has turned a very negative situation, a risk, into a positive in his life. This is known as resiliency.

Manchild's resiliency and resolve were evident in the way in which he bounced back after his father's last arrest. He had a difficult time at first during the month after the arrest, but soon returned to normal and began to thrive again in his educational environment as evidenced by his continual success and passing his classes. Manchild's resiliency supports the claim made by Connell et al. (1994) suggesting that familial support is a greater indicator of resilience than economic conditions or gender. Being able to depend on his mother always to be there has fostered resiliency in Manchild.

Cinnamon has endured and is resilient. She has endured the hardships of homelessness, poverty, countless transitions, and teen pregnancy, all while completing her high school diploma and graduating early. Is there a quote about here resiliency?

My nieces and nephew have developed a sense of resiliency as well. I see my family continuing to strive and thrive even as our family is fragmented. My nieces and my nephew have each experienced hardship because of their father's incarceration, but they continue to matriculate in school and generally are successful, making A's and B's.

They support one another and keep in contact with each other, which also fosters resiliency.

Despite a life of extreme poverty, homelessness, constant moving, early days and late nights, and abuse, these students have survived and thrived. They have overcome numerous obstacles in their lives and continue to matriculate through the education process. They are resilient.

### **Relationship to Previous Research**

As we look at the already established literature regarding children of incarcerated parents, there seems to be no difference in the experiences of these students. These students also experience economic stressors, caregiver issues, living arrangements and psychological stressors due to the incarceration of a parent. This portion of the chapter will compare the stories of these students with research previously done in the field of study. The topics and subtopics from the review of literature will be compared with the experiences of the participants.

### **Incarceration of Parents**

As the literature suggested, when fathers are incarcerated, more often than not, mothers are left behind to care for the children. These students are no different in that respect. Cinnamon, Manchild, Toughguy and Sparkle, all reside with their mother as their primary caretaker, as their father is the incarcerated parent. As Walker (2011) reported, the incarceration of the father affects the entire family, emotionally,

psychologically and economically. Each of these students has experienced some facets of this statement. All of them have been affected emotionally. Each one describes either being sad or missing their father during the period of incarceration. Toughguy reported being angry which caused him to lose his temper quickly. This may be categorized as both emotional and psychological effects. The sadness that both Cinnamon and Sparkle shared can get severe at times, resulting in depression, which is also a psychological effect. Finally, all of these children are affected economically. All students qualified for free or reduced lunch, which means they fall below 185% of the Federal income poverty guidelines (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 2012).

For Slim, her life is typical of what Greenberg (2006) described as unceasing trauma, frenzied lifestyles and family anger, when discussing children whose mothers were incarcerated. As with the studies by Glaze & Maruschak (2010), Slim's mom has been incarcerated for non-violent crimes such as drug offenses and crimes against self, like prostitution. This supports the notion of "America's War on Drugs" as a mitigating factor in the increase of maternal incarceration.

Fortunately for these participants, no one reported having seen their parent arrested, this too is supported by the data (Bernstein, 2005, Travis, 2005). Then too, the loss is still very present, especially for Sparkle, who reported not wanting to go home, because her stepfather was no longer at home when she arrived from school.

## **Economic Stressors**

All of these students can be considered economically challenged. They all receive either free or reduced lunch, which means they fall within 185% of the Federal poverty level. Of the participants, only Slim revealed in conversation that her family received SNAP benefits. She often came to school with ill-fitting clothes and her hair uncombed or disheveled; Slim appeared “poor.” I never noticed her wearing new clothes and most of the shoes she had were worn and tattered.

Cinnamon’s family in particular, was strained economically. Since the loss of her father’s income, the family became homeless and had to leave their home in the suburbs of the city to move to the inner city. They did recover from that loss of revenue, but when only one income is available, the loss of those earnings becomes insurmountable. Once her mother became ill and had to be hospitalized; she lost her job. They became homeless again and had to live in the car, only this time with a newborn baby. This may commence the cycle of generational poverty. Hence you have a second generation of children affected by incarceration.

For the remaining participants, other than being able to receive free or reduced lunch, they did not mention having economic issues. Although one might presume that having two incomes would be more beneficial than just having one or, in some cases, none. In my family each mother, of the five children that my brother has fathered has at one time or another needed financial help from my parents. And as they have been able,

they have helped them. My mother never forgets to send each one of them a Christmas box of clothes, shoes and toys and she also remembers their birthdays with gifts.

### **Children's Issues**

Children face a variety of issues when parents are incarcerated. Discussed here are the living arrangements, caregivers, visitation and psychological stressors as they pertain to the participants. Financial problems, single parenthood, ineffective parenting and depression eventually lead to poor outcomes for children regardless of the parent's incarceration status (Kjellstrand, 2009). Children of incarcerated parents face the aforementioned challenges, plus the stigma and silence of incarceration. Previous studies showed that most children of parents in prison had been subjected to a variety of risk factors prior to the parent's incarceration and did not live in traditional nuclear families (Bernstein, 2005; Casey Foundation, 2007; Children's Services Practice Notes, 2002; Johnson, 2005).

Only Cinnamon and Sparkle reported living in traditional nuclear families prior to their parent's arrest. The Casey Foundation (2007) also reported that about 75% of parents were unmarried or divorced at the time of arrest. This is also true of these participants. The majority of students in this study, three out of the five, had parents that were unmarried at the time of arrest. As seen through this study, these children also face the added burden of shame and secrecy that surrounds parental incarceration.



## **Living Arrangements & Caregivers**

As the research suggests, when fathers are imprisoned, children usually are left in the care of their mothers. Glaze and Maruschak (2010) reported that 88% of fathers who were incarcerated reported at least one of their children lived with the child's mother. This is true of all the participants, with the exception of Slim whose mother is incarcerated. Cinnamon, Manchild, Sparkle and Toughguy all live with their mothers as their fathers are incarcerated. Manchild's and Toughguy's other siblings fathered by their fathers, also lived with their respective mothers.

Mothers in prison, typically rely on kinship care; more often than not the maternal grandmother becomes the primary caregiver of the children (Bell, 2008) and "Among African Americans, kinship caregivers are mostly maternal grandmothers" (p. 7). This was the case for Slim. Until her grandmother's untimely death, she and her brother, although they had different fathers, lived with their maternal grandmother. Bell (2008) also stated that grandmothers may be ill-equipped health wise to care for young grandchildren. This apparently was also the case for Slim and Roughneck, since their grandmother passed. This forced Slim and Roughneck to another family member, a maternal uncle. This produced a new dilemma, one of developing a relationship between Uncle Johnny and Slim. Although, unlike most children whose mothers are incarcerated, Slim never remembered her mother being her primary caretaker, losing her grandmother produced another issue of loss, the loss attributed to death. Since then she lived with various relatives, was taken in by an uncle and recently went to live with her

half-sister (her father's daughter). This most likely will cause Slim and her brother to be split apart since they have different fathers.

Because of my brother's incarceration, my parents have taken in two of his five children. Currently my parents care for my nephew, the youngest of my brother's children. He has been in their care for the past five years, since he was seven years old. This is a difficult situation for my parents because of their age and lifestyle. They are supposed to be in their "golden years", ready to retire and travel, but are now parenting a preteen. However, because his mother has legally lost her parental rights, they feel obligated to provide conservatorship for him.

### **Visitation**

Manchild was the only participant who reported having frequent contact with his incarcerated parent. He talked to his father on the phone and even visited him. This too supports the previous research citing more than 75% of parents in state prisons reported having some contact with their children via phone contact or calls (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). None of the other participants mentioned having visits with their parents, which also coincides with earlier data stating that most parents report never having a personal visit with their children since admission (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

My family visits my brother and communicates with him often. Even when he was jailed more than 800 miles away from my parents, they still visited him at least once every other month. Now, he is less than 30 miles from home so visits are more frequent. We attempt to have someone from the family or a friend visit weekly.

## **Psychological Stressors**

In addition to the other stressors that coincide with the incarceration of a parent, psychological stressors may be the most detrimental and the most difficult to change. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to exhibit violent or delinquent behavior (Lee, 2005). After all of the obstacles they must face, it's no wonder why. Each child has a unique situation and is affected by a number of variables. Some children of incarcerated parents may suffer from low self-esteem, and poor self-image. In one study, Greenberg (2006) summarized these stressors as stemming from the five "S's," which are stigma, shame, separation, secrecy, and silence. The participants in this study experienced the aforementioned five "S's". Because of the stigma attached to being a child of an incarcerated parent, this causes them to be embarrassed. Meanwhile they continue to keep it a secret, so they do not have to face the stigma and shame associated with their parent's incarceration. The separation is the missing place in the lives of children when parents are taken away when incarcerated. The stigma, shame, separation, secrecy, and silence become a cycle that students must accept as part of their reality.

## **Discussion of Themes**

Analysis of the themes presented in the data led to several conclusions. The first is that the schooling experiences of African American students whose parents are

incarcerated are complicated. The lives of these children are altered in such a profound way that all facets in their lives are affected, including their education.

The major themes and subthemes addressing the schooling experiences of African American students whose parents are incarcerated were: (1) MIA – Missing in Action, (2) Shh...It's a secret, (3) We're doing time too, (4) Just keep moving, and (5) Can you feel me? How incarceration has affected the school experience of African American students can be obtained from the final theme, (1) "You still want me to focus on school?" and its subthemes a) Typical school day, b) difficult to focus, c) not going to think about it, d) what they want teachers to know and e) looking to the future.

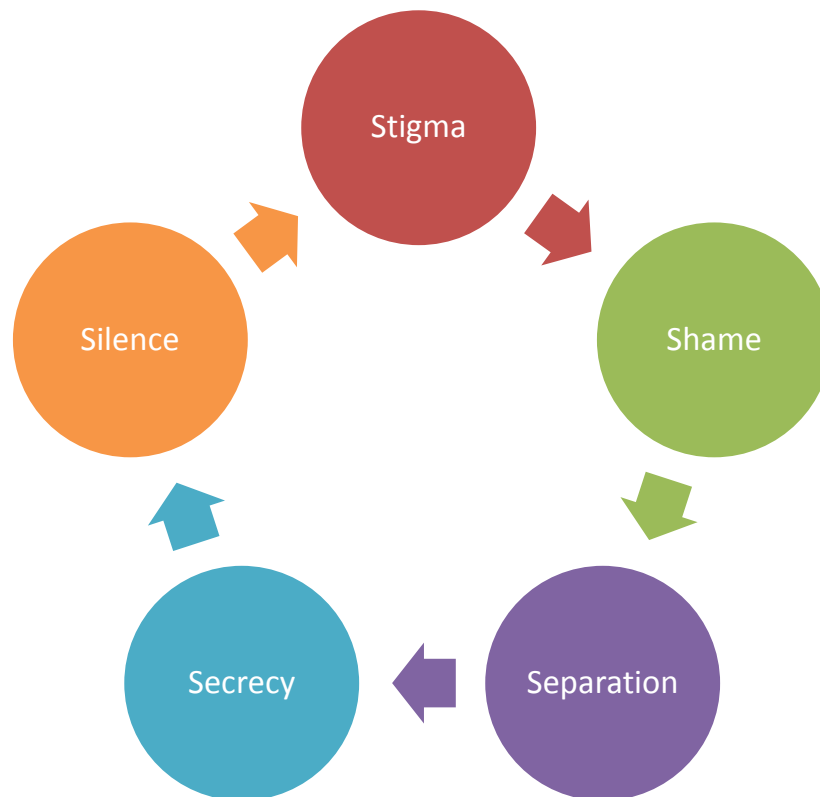


Figure 4: The 5 S's

### **The 5 S's, MIA and Shh...It's a Secret**

Some of the schooling experiences of African American children are closely related to Greenberg's Five "S's" (2006) illustrated in Figure 4. For instance, MIA closely mirrors separation. For students whose parents are incarcerated, the absence of the parent is genuine. Although each of these students had a unique story, the theme of the missing parent was evident throughout the process. Children, regardless of how bad their parents may be or what their parents have done, they still love their parents and miss their presence is missed in the children's lives. Although some, like Slim, may not realize they actually miss their parent, because they have replaced that void with another emotion. For Slim the emotion is hate.

The silence and secrecy that children of imprisoned parents face are stifling. None of the students interviewed were expressly forthcoming about their parent's incarceration. Each of them kept the secret of incarceration from their teachers, administrators and counselors. Only if teachers are willing to listen will they hear the whispers of the children they teach - the whispers that tell them a child may be homeless, hurting or hungry. Through the silence, teachers and school administrators must hear the screams these children are crying for help. This help may not necessarily be in the form of money or materials, but simply in the form of a listening ear - an ear that hears, but does not judge.

Part of the silence and secrecy is the shame. Children are ashamed of their parents' incarceration because of the stigma that society places on incarceration. Being

incarcerated means a person has been convicted of a crime, which then means the person must have done something bad. Therefore imprisonment equals criminal which equals bad. Also, society places degrees of “badness” to certain crimes. While women mostly commit crimes against self, such as prostitution or drug offenses, which are considered “non-violent” crimes, society may not see these as particularly egregious, especially if the mother says that she was selling herself or drugs in order to provide for her family. However the fact remains, it is a crime punishable by imprisonment.

Slim referred to her mother’s arrest and involvement with incarceration as being because she “did drugs and other things.” Like many other women who are incarcerated, Slim’s mother also was incarcerated for drugs. Slim is ashamed of her mother’s incarceration. This shame comes from the stigma attached to incarceration. This leads to the secrecy and silence, and in Slim’s case...hate.

Cinnamon’s mother, in order to hide her husband’s incarceration, went as far as to say that he had abandoned the family. Cinnamon’s mother is ashamed of her husband’s incarceration. She tells the children to say that their father abandoned them rather than face the truth of his incarceration. The stigma associated with his incarceration is compounded by the charges he has been convicted of, rape and failing to self-identify as a convicted sex offender on the sex offender registry. Incarceration for crimes such as this has an increased stigma and causes more shame as evidenced by Cinnamon’s mother telling her to tell others that her father had abandoned them. This

leads to another type of secrecy - the secrecy of living a lie, which amplifies the silence in this case.

The silence is not as loud in the case of Manchild and Sparkle. I feel this is due to the stability of their home lives. Both Manchild and Sparkle have mothers at home therefore, their home lives have not changed significantly. This is opposed to Slim, Toughguy and Cinnamon, whose lives seriously have been disrupted by their parents' incarceration. Although they are still silent, Manchild and Sparkle both manage to contain their silence. Manchild breaks the silence occasionally with outbreaks of disruption to classes. Sparkle's silence cries out for attention by wearing clothes that beg for male attention.

The silence eventually may become too difficult to maintain and these children grow into adults. One day, like the spoken word artist Daniel Beaty (2009) says, they begin to wonder why? Why didn't Daddy ever come home? Why didn't he teach me what I needed to know to be a man? Why am I left with these feelings of abandonment? Then the silence can no longer be stifled. The questions are raised louder.

All of these students are affected by the separation from their parents. In addition, they must deal with the stigma, silence, secrecy and shame that incarceration of a parent brings. These students must deal with these factors and a plethora of other factors, such as the confines they experience as a result of their parent's incarceration, constant mobility and the emotional aspects of parental incarceration.

My family too, must deal with these five S's. The stigma that is associated with an imprisoned family member causes me not to talk about my brother. I become silent in conversations about family in an effort to keep this secret. I wonder if people will look at me differently if they know I have a brother in prison. I am not ashamed because I realize those were his choices and not mine, but I do not broadcast his situation either.

### **Constant Mobility**

For Cinnamon, Slim and Manchild, constant mobility plagued their lives. These frequent moves and changes in schooling may cause gaps in learning. For some children whose parents are incarcerated, homelessness becomes a reality. This is the case for both Cinnamon and Slim. Cinnamon and her family were homeless after her father's incarceration. And although Slim was never left on the street like Cinnamon and her family, she certainly spent some time not knowing where she would be staying at night.

Even though homelessness stems from poverty and this poverty stems from parental incarceration, its effects on education are compounded. When students are homeless, they are not able to get to and from school, let alone concentrate once they are in school. Even when they are moved into a home, it often means another change in schooling. This may cause changes in school friends and supportive teachers or peers that may have been available to students prior to the move. At this new school, the student has to make new friends, maybe be behind in learning, especially if the number of absences were massive. Frequent absences and gaps in learning lead to low test



scores on standardized exams. With these low test scores and low grades in classes, students risk failing one or more classes and possibly being retained.

One of the reasons my parents first decided to care for my nephew was because he was retained in the second grade due to multiple absences. His mother had lived in several places, with her mother, on her own, with her boyfriend in another city; she moved so frequently that my nephew did not attend school enough days to be promoted. In addition, with the many gaps in learning he faced during a critical stage of formative education, he continues to have problems in some subjects even now.

### **Emotional Instability**

When parents are imprisoned, students face a variety of emotions. The emotions felt by the participants ranged from sadness and hurt to anger and hate. On the other hand, none of the participants felt happy or joyous about the incarceration of their parent. As they matriculate through schools, children of incarcerated parents must force these emotions to the back of their minds in order to concentrate. At times, this may be impossible to accomplish.

The emotional aspect may be hidden during the day, but triggered when adults are insensitive to the needs of the student. An example that comes to mind immediately is my own, when I told a seventh grade student, “You might as well get fitted for your orange suit” (prisoners wear orange in this state), not knowing that his mother was imprisoned. In a weird way, though, looking back, that helped us develop a relationship because he recognized that I knew what prisoners wear. My later apology, more likely

than not, sealed the deal, so to speak. He then recognized that I was aware of his plight and chose not to treat him differently nor embarrass him about his situation. Educators need to know this information, so that we will not make careless mistakes or comments.

These students may be ill-equipped to handle these emotions and may act out by misbehaving in classes, bullying other students, not attending classes, especially with a teacher who is constantly berating or belittling students, cursing out teachers and administrators, or just expressing oppositional defiant behavior.

### **Recommendations for Future Practices**

#### **We Must Know**

If we are to help children whose parents are incarcerated, we first must know who these students are. As yet, there is not a registry or documentation of children whose parents are incarcerated. If we could note somehow in their electronic student files or have a code for parental incarceration, similar to the codes for economically disadvantaged, homelessness, giftedness, special education, emotionally disturbed or any of the other codes that educators currently use to describe students who are “labeled.” In my opinion, CIP’s are impacted by many of these factors concurrently. Specifically, they may be homeless, economically disadvantaged, emotionally disturbed, gifted, and a teen parent all at the same time. Knowing they have a parent incarcerated can help teachers understand when students like Slim say, “Leave me alone, I have more on my mind than doing homework.” Identifying who these students are may help teachers

understand why a student did not do homework, because they were homeless. Is not that an oxymoron -- homeless students doing homework? If teachers know who these students are, they may be more empathetic of their trials and adversities. However, just knowing is not enough, we also must do something.

Since teachers do not know who these students are, it may be incumbent upon the students to inform teachers of their unique situations. However, students must trust the teacher in order for this to occur. When there is a level of trust, students can confide in teachers in various forms. First, students can just initiate a conversation with the teacher, counselor or administrator. The conversation should be private, perhaps between classes, during lunch, or before or after school. The conversation can also happen during class time, as time permits, maybe out in the hall or in a place where other students are not able to hear. Secondly, students can write the teacher a note. In this digital age, a student can email the teacher. Many teachers allow students to journal. This is also an available option for students to share this information with the teacher. Lastly, students can confide in their counselors or share with a close adult and tell the counselor or trusted adult to share their current situation with their teachers. Care should be taken with this information however. Teachers should never allow other students to know the student's predicament. Just as laws protect the right of privacy of students, this information would become a part of the student record and would as such be a part of the students' private record. The information should be kept private like other school information such as grades, discipline reports, scores and other pertinent information is

handled. The next segment gives recommendations to teachers and administrators on how to address these students' particular needs.

### **Addressing the Needs of CIP's in School**

Teachers, counselors and school administrators must address the needs of children of incarcerated parents. They are indeed "at risk." In fact, children of incarcerated parents may, at some time, have all of these at risk indicators one or more times during their incarceration. The results of this study show that these students meet many of the criteria. For instance, with the frequent moving around, students may have gaps in their learning which would cause them to not score satisfactory on readiness or assessment instruments in primary grades, 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>, and may be more harmful during Pre-Kindergarten or kindergarten. In later years, gaps in learning from frequent absences may be the cause of students not maintaining a passing grade in two or more core subjects, which is also an "at risk" indicator. Absences can also lead to not matriculating from one grade to the next for one or more years, still yet another "at risk" indicator.

Frequent moving, as in Slim's case, may cause minor gaps in learning. These gaps may cause a student to be unsuccessful on state examinations one year and then scoring less than 110% on the same assessment the next year, especially if the tests build upon one another as in the case of many math and language arts exams. Or like Slim's brother, some students just drop out. If her brother decides to return to school, because he formerly dropped out, would be considered "at risk." Instead Slim uses her mother's incarceration as fuel to continue her education. Slim uses the "non-example" her mother

set as a picture of what she does not want to resemble ultimately. Her risky situation, her mother's absence, has made her determined to complete her education and be better than her mother.

Cinnamon, in this study, also became a parent. Being pregnant or being a parent is also an "at risk" indicator. She also was homeless, yet another indicator, and having been held back for absences was an additional "at risk" indicator. Had Slim continued at Clean Woods and kept getting office referrals, eventually, she would have been either expelled, which is an at risk indicator, or placed at the alternative education campus, which also is an at risk indicator. With the exception of English not being their primary language, any of these students could be identified as "at risk." And all of these can be traced back to one origin...having an incarcerated parent, which itself is not an "at risk" indicator.

By TEA standards, these students have multiple indicators for being at risk for dropping out of school. The mere fact that they have overcome these indicators and, for most of them, are continuing in school, shows their resilience. Already, Cinnamon has completed her high school diploma by enrolling in an alternative education program. Each of the participants had set goals beyond high school. They are not planning on going to jail like their parents, but then again, who does? I am sure their parents did not have the goal set of being imprisoned.

Students also may suffer cognitive setbacks due to intrusive thoughts about parents, concern about their future and the future of their parents (Bernstein, 2005; Lee,

2005). These intrusive thoughts also may be flashbacks of the traumatic events surrounding the arrest if witnessed by the child (Gabel & Johnston, 1995; Lee, 2005). These cognitive setbacks added to the frequent absences produce cavernous gaps in their education.

It is important for educators to take into consideration the negatives of incarceration but not allow those negativities to define how they teach the student. The must be treated with integrity. Many of the obstacles faced by African American children with imprisoned parents are indeed negative, but allow the student to be defined by their gifts and talents and not by the mistakes of the parent. As Beaty (2009) so eloquently stated, yes these adolescents are their parents' children, but they are not their parent's mistakes.

### **What the Students Wanted Teachers to Know**

Student's responses to what they wanted teachers to know varied. A few of the participants did not want teachers to know their parents were incarcerated. This is from fear of judgment or being treated differently. Although, looking beyond their words, we may see what they are not saying.

Toughguy's silence can be heard in his anger from the abuse he suffered. He said that it made him angry and short-tempered. A teacher will hear his silence most if he/she yells at him. He wanted teachers to know that it is not good to yell at a kid like him. Yelling at him causes him to be angry and respond in a way that gets him into trouble. He also didn't want teachers to keep harping on the same subject.

Even when students said that they don't have anything to say to teachers, that is also saying something. Children whose parents are imprisoned may not want teachers to know for fear of being pitied or treated differently. The students may have a valid point; recent data have shown that teachers lower expectations when they know a student has an incarcerated parent (Dallaire, 2009). When teachers know, they will have to make a valiant effort to treat students fairly and continue to hold high expectations for these students.

One important suggestion from the participants is that teachers take the time to listen them. Toughguy says he wants teachers to listen and allow students to explain their unique situations. Teachers may think they know these students' situations, but overwhelmingly may be incorrect. The teachers should listen to their students - to both what they are saying and what they are not saying. They should be able to discern the silence the children of incarcerated parents present. For instance, notice when a usually talkative student is quiet. Notice when a student who is normally alert in class is falling asleep. Notice when a normally neatly dressed adolescent is disheveled. Teachers must listen with their ears as well as their eyes to what they hear and do not hear, to what they see and do not see.

### **Best Practices for Teachers**

Teachers must take the time to form positive professional relationships with students. Building relationships speaks volumes in the African American culture. If the student feels that the teacher cares, the students are more apt to open up and reveal their

home situation. This may include incarceration or it may be that they are hungry, abused or not feeling well. When students are comfortable with the teacher, they will open up as Toughguy did with Mr. Rollins. The point is to develop a rapport so when there is a behavior change, the teacher is more likely to notice and may be able to avoid behavioral problems and classroom disruptions before they occur.

Shaking hands at the door allowed me to assess my students. This may not work for all teachers. Getting to know my students on an individual basis and showing them that I care about them has helped me to lower the number of class disruptions and thereby increase the efficacy of my teaching because I am able to use more time for teaching and less time addressing behavior problems. Relationship building does not happen instantly, the process takes time in the beginning; however, it allows me to save time later in the school year because I am able to cover more material on a daily basis once those classroom relationships are established. Figure 5 shows other keys to building rapport with African American high school students.



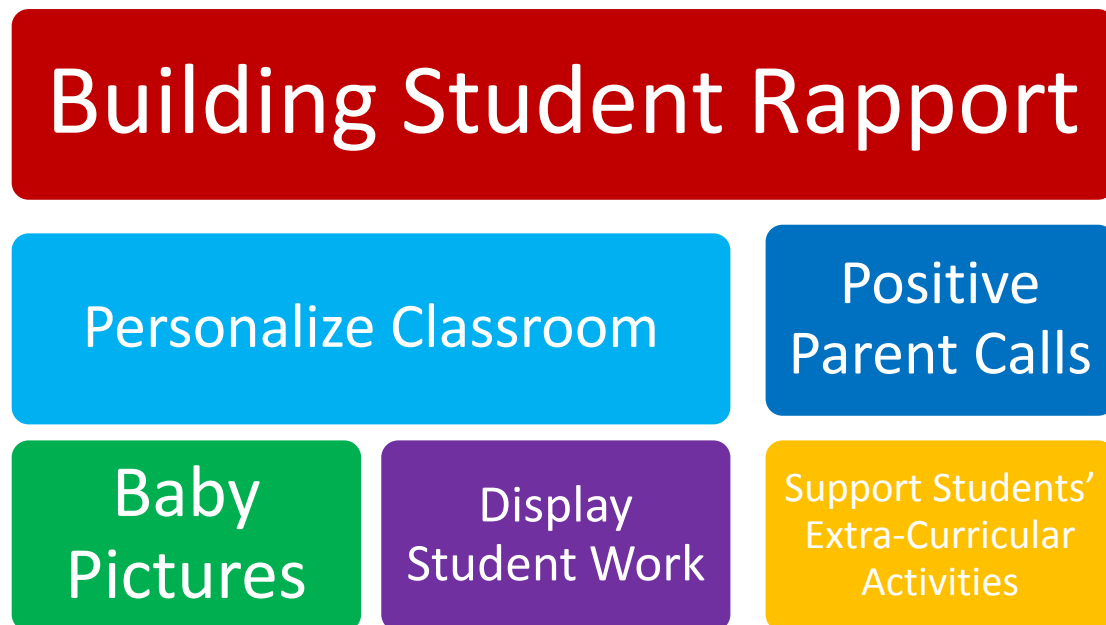


Figure 5: Building Student Rapport

The key to building rapport and establishing relationships with students is to make the student feel less threatened by the classroom environment. One way to do this is to personalize the classroom. I hang baby pictures at the beginning of the year. The students' first homework assignment is to bring in a baby picture or a picture of themselves before they lost their two front teeth. In the years since I have been doing this, I have encompassed a few problems, such as parents not wanting students to lose the picture or afraid of it becoming damaged. I tell them that a copy of the picture is fine. They can take a picture with their phones and email it me or make a photo copy. I use tape on the back of the picture and place it on a sheet of construction paper to make a paper frame. The students then write their first name and what they want to be in the

future. On rare occasions, students may have lost documents in a fire or moved and cannot find any.

This is a chance to build rapport because I take this opportunity to have a one-on-one chat with the student to elicit the circumstances. This gives a peak into the child's home life without the teacher asking questions or seeming "nosey". I tell the students that I need these pictures to remind me that they are someone's baby and I need to remember that each student has a future beyond the classroom. However, this personalizes the classroom, with a little part of each student; they are visually able to see each day they come into the class. The pictures are returned at the end of the year. Another way to personalize the classroom is by hanging exceptional student work.

Positive parent calls foster a familial relationship. At the beginning of each school year, I attempt to call every student's parent, to let them know how excited I am to teach their child each school year. Some parents may not have ever received a positive call and are surprised to get a call during the first week of school as most students are temporarily well-behaved in the beginning of the school year. The positive parent calls are important later when or if a student misbehaves. The parent knows that you care about the student and responds positively even with the news of the student's misbehavior. I always "sandwich" parent interactions, phone calls or emails, with a positive, followed by the negative behavior and then end with another positive. For example:

*Teacher: Hello, may I please speak with Mr. Jones.*

*Parent: This is Mr. Jones*

*Teacher: Hi Mr. Jones, this is Ms. Larke, Tony's Biology teacher. I wanted to tell you that usually Tony is very well-behaved in Biology. He participates frequently and has done extremely well working on his assignments. But today, during class, when I asked him to put up his cell phone, he refused. I was shocked, since he is usually very compliant. Not only did he refuse, but he informed me that I would not be taking up his phone because I don't pay his bill. I was wondering if you can talk with him about his behavior in class today. As I said, this behavior is not what I have come to expect from him as a young man and a scholar.*

*Parent: (yelling) Tony come here right now...*

Usually the parent will talk to the student and the problem is fixed. At this point most students apologize or sometimes they will attempt to say it's not true.

Undoubtedly, since this is not the first time I have called, the conversation goes much better.

Finally, attending the student's extra-curricular activities bolsters students' assurance that the teacher legitimately cares for them individually. Attend sporting events, plays, competitions and even church activities when invited by students. The students enjoy seeing you in the stands or in the audience. Teachers do not have to participate in all of the school's activities, but attempt to support the students, especially those students who may be difficult to reach.

Students will misbehave; after all, they are human. How educators respond to misbehavior can be critical, especially when dealing with African American students whose parents are incarcerated. When behavioral problems arise, as much as possible, keep them private. Take students to the side or talk with them quietly. Drawing attention to the student and the problem tends to make the problem worse. This would be especially problematic for children of incarcerated parents. If the problem created by incarceration affects the classroom, the student will not want to discuss this openly in front of peers.

The stigma and shame associated with parental incarceration inhibits an open conversation involving peers or others. Instead, take the student to the side; ask to speak to them after class or after school. Speak quietly, perhaps while others are doing independent work, and say, (If the environment is conducive to such a conversation)

*“You seem different today. Is there something you would like to say?”*

*“Can we talk after class or out in the hallway?”*

Remember, the key is privacy in this situation. Do not exacerbate the misbehavior by embarrassing or “loud talking” the student. This may escalate the problem.

Always keep in mind that these students have lives outside of school, which may vary depending on the circumstances. The course that you teach may not be as important to students as it is to the teacher at that very moment. If a student slept in the

car last night and did not get anything to eat earlier in the morning, learning Algebra, Biology or English, may be the farthest thought from the student's mind.

When students believe that educators care about them beyond the walls of the classroom, they are more likely to be successful in learning within the classroom walls. Use the student's experiences to legitimize the student and make the experiences a part of the curriculum. Treat the students as competent learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Hernandez, 2001). These recommendations concur with best practices in the classroom that increase student achievement (Bennett, 2011).

### **Limitations for the Study and Further Research**

This study is limited for various reasons. Primarily, it is limited as it only captures the voices of five African American teenagers. Further research should be done with larger groups of African American children as well as children of other ethnicities and age groups. In addition, these students are from a large urban high school. Would the voices of rural students be different?

There needs to be more research from the view of the students in this area as it relates to education. African American students continue to receive the highest number of discipline referrals in schools and the lowest scores on standardized testing. The need exists to close the achievement gap and increase the learning in classrooms across this nation. More research is needed to provide teaching strategies to meet the needs of these students. Research teachers in areas where there are a high number of CIP's who can

share their strategies when they are successful in helping these children achieve. A longitudinal study of these five participants may allow insight into the long-term effects of parental incarceration.

Exploring the impact of incarceration on Latino, White, Native American or other ethnic groups are studies, which may elicit new information or different findings. In addition, a comparison study of the impact of incarceration on the various groups may prove interesting. Are the groups equally affected or are some groups more adversely?

Finally, are their differences in children from single-parent families and children of incarcerated parents? More research comparing these groups needs to be done. For instance, are teen pregnancy rates higher in single-parent families or in families affected by incarceration?

There are programs that exist to aid children of incarcerated parents. Research should be done to test the efficacy of these programs. Are these programs actually helping children whose parents are imprisoned? In addition, with new focus on young men of color, can new programs like President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" (White House Initiative, 2014a) support efforts to decrease the number of young men going to prisons and develop these young men into productive citizens in society?

President Obama wants to enlist members of the community and businesses to support young men of color by mentoring these adolescents, providing a support network, and provide these youth with the skills they need to find gainful employment or attend college (White House Initiative, 2014b). Initially the President wants to focus on

programs that work and institute those programs nationally. The White House recognizes the growing disparities in reading skills between African American and Latino American males and their White counterparts (White House Initiative, 2014b). My Brother's Keeper will focus on unlocking the full potential of boys and young men of color (White House Initiative, 2014b).

### **Conclusion**

The voices of African American children of incarcerated parents need to be heard. If we are to aid effectively in eradicating the achievement gap and ensure that no child is left behind, we cannot forget about this group of children. The students' voices are clear. They miss their parents and it affects their education. When we look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs citation, a basic need is to be safe and have your physical needs met -- food, shelter and clothing. For these students, these basic needs are not met, and we cannot ignore their plight to receive quality education.

The research shows clearly that African Americans are incarcerated at higher rates than other groups of people. Historically African Americans have faced slavery, "Jim Crow Laws", unfair treatment and fractured civil rights. The surmounting effects of history coupled with reinforced racial biases and stereotypes may lead current researchers to believe that African American children are destined for "doom." However, the "promise" of African American children must become the mantra for their effective and meaningful education.

History points towards a solution to facilitate that promise. Education is the great equalizer. When citizens are educated, they are better able to support their families and break the cycles of economic challenges and incarceration. It is incumbent upon teachers to become the agents of change and create a new future with increased opportunities for African American students to prevent them from repeating the mistakes of their parents and stop the cycle of familial incarceration. Educators must do this, not just because it is the right thing to do, but ultimately because the children they serve are worthy of being treated with integrity and respect.

These five African American students bravely have broken the “code of silence” and wish to be heard. I cannot imagine a more befitting way to honor their voices than to assist educators who develop into change agents. Affirm children of incarcerated parents for the love they have for their parents. At the same time, affirm that they have a right to be hurt and disappointed because their parent is presently absent from their lives; however, they are not their parents’ choices (Beatty, 2009). Educators should be change agents, touching the lives of students and leaving an indelible footprint on each child within their grasp, academically and socially. Therefore a deeper understanding of the plight of children of incarcerated parents is not an option; it is a requirement and a privilege.



## REFERENCES

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2007, October). *Focus on children with incarcerated parents: An overview of the research literature*. Baltimore, MD: Hairston, C. F.
- Arditti, J. A. & Few, A. L. (2006). Mothers' reentry into family life following incarceration. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17(1), 103-123.
- Arditti, J. A. & McClintock, C. (2001). Drug policy and families: Casualties of the war. *Marriage and Family Review*, 32(3/4), 11-32.
- Arditti, J. A. (2005). Families and incarceration: An ecological approach. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 86(2), 251-260.
- Arditti, J. A., Lambert-Shute, J. & Joest, K. (2003). Saturday morning at the jail: Implications of incarceration for families and children. *Family Relations*, 52(3), 195-204.
- Bates, R. E., Lawrence-Wills, S., Hairston, C. F. (Summer 2003). *Children and families of incarcerated parents: A view from the ground* (Research Brief: Children, Families, and the Criminal Justice System). Jane Addams Center for Social Policy and Research Jane Addams College of Social Work: University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Beaty, D. B. (2009, November 19) Knock, knock [Uploaded YouTube video from Def Jam poetry session]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuhnNwbZRl8>.

- Bell, P. W. (2008). *The relational patterns between African American mothers under correctional supervision and maternal caregiving grandmothers*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (UMI No. 3309004).
- Bennett, C. I. (2011). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bernstein, N. (2005). *All alone in this world: Children of incarcerated parents*. New York: The New Press.
- Books, S. (Ed.) (2007). *Invisible children in the society and its schools*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1 Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1 Attachment*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) New York: Basic Books.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, C. (2013). *Modern American incarceration and labor economics*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (UMI No. 3592670).
- Bruns, D. A. (2006). Promoting mother-child relationships for incarcerated women and their children. *Infants & Young Children*, 19(4), 308-322.

- Carlson, L. W. (2010). *Parental Stress of incarcerated mothers of adolescents*. (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3400945).
- Conn, C. E. (2011). *Parental separation and long-term outcomes for inmates: Unexplored terrain*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI 3489178).
- Connell, J. P., Spencer, M. B., & Aber, J. L. (1994) Educational risk and resilience in African-American youth: Context, self, action, and outcomes in school. *Child Development*, 65(2), 493-506.
- Coulthard, J. (2010). *Parental incarceration and the ties that bind: Children of offenders as collateral damage*. (Doctoral Thesis) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (NR72598).
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dallaire, D. H. (2007). Incarcerated mothers and fathers: A comparison of risks for children and families. *Family Relations*, 56, 440 – 453.
- Dallaire, D. H., Ciccone, A. & Wilson, L. C. (2010). Teachers' experiences with and expectations of children with incarcerated parents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 31, 281-90.

- Diller, M. A. (2008). *No child of an incarcerated parent left behind*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication number: UMI 3308871).
- Elkington, K. S., Bauermeister, J. A. & Zimmerman, M. A. (2011). Do parents and peers matter? A prospective socio-ecological examination of substance use and sexual risk among African American youth. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34, 1035-47.
- Evans, G. W. & Wachs, T. D. (Eds.). (2010). *Chaos and its influence on children's development: An ecological perspective*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Finlay, K. E. (2007). *External effects of incarceration on labor and marriage markets*. Ph D dissertation, University of California Irvine, United States, California. Retrieved February 9, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication number: UMI 3274335).
- Ford, D. Y. (2004) Recruiting and retaining gifted students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language groups. In Banks, J. A. & McGee-Banks, C. A. (Eds.). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) (pp. 379-97). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley/Jossey-Bass.
- Fortuna, K., Roiseman, G. I., Hadon, K. C., Groh, A. M., Holland, A. S. (2011). *Attachment states of mind and the quality of young adults' sibling relationships*. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(5), 1366-73.

- Gabel, K. & Johnston, D. (1995). *Children of incarcerated parents*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Gall, J. P., Gall, M. D., & Borg, W. R. (2005). *Applying educational research: A practical guide* (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2004) Curriculum theory and multicultural education. In Banks, J. A. & McGee-Banks, C. A. (Eds.). *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) (pp. 30 – 49). New York: Macmillan.
- Gerhardt, S. E. (2012). *Parent education for women in community corrections*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3540955).
- Gilberto Cesar, G. T. (2012). *Social learning in context: group homies mentorship, and social support*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1520188).
- Glass, S. L. (2010). *Maternal incarceration and childhood development*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3498696).
- Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2010). Parents in prison and their minor children. Bureau of Justice Statistics: Special Report. (NCJ 222984). Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

- Greenberg, R. (2006). Children and families: Mothers who are incarcerated. *Children and Families, Women & Therapy*, 29(3-4), 165-179. Available from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J015v29n03\\_09](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J015v29n03_09).
- Hagen, K. A. & Myers, B. J. (2003). The effect of secrecy and social support on behavioral problems of children of incarcerated mothers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 12(2), 229-242.
- Hairston, C. F. (2007). *Focus on children with incarcerated parents: An overview of the research literature*. Canada: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Hanlon, T. E., Blatchley, R. J., Bennett-Sears, T., O'Grady, K. E., Rose, M., & Callaman, J. M. (2005). Vulnerability of children of incarcerated addict mothers: Implications for preventive intervention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 67-84.
- Hartsfield, J. (2011). *Diagnosing the past, consequences for the future: A life cycles of trauma and mental health issues for incarcerated women. Does race matter?*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3453946)
- Haskins, A. R. (2013). *Mass imprisonment, educational inequality and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage: Effects of paternal incarceration on children's educational outcomes and school contexts*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3592481).

- Hayward, R. A. & DePanfilis, D. (2007). Foster children with an incarcerated parent: Predictors of reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 1320-1334.
- Hernandez, H. (2001). *Multicultural education: A teacher's guide to linking context, process and content*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Hilton, C. N. (2006). *The psychological impact of incarcerated parents on their offspring: An exploratory investigation*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3222077).
- Hodder, R. K., Daly, J., Freund, M., Bowman, J., Hazell, T., & Wiggers, J. (2011). A school-based resilience intervention to decrease tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use in high school students. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 722-31.
- Jenkins, D. S. (2010). *Comprehensive support for children of incarcerated parents and their families*. (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1486336).
- Johnson, T. K. (2005). *Hidden voices: The life experiences of African American adolescent girls with mothers in prison*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 33184833).
- Johnston, D. & Carlin, M. (2004, February). When incarcerated parents loose contact with their children. *CCIP Journal*, 6(1). Retrieved from <http://www.e-ccip.org/journal.html>.
- Johnston, E. I., & Waldfogel, J. (2002). Children of incarcerated parents: Cumulative risk and children's living arrangements (Report No. JCPR-WP-306). University

- of Chicago, Joint Center for Poverty Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED468566).
- Jones, D. R. (2008, November 27). Volunteers making a difference. *New York Amsterdam News*, 99(49). 5.
- Kaminsky, J. O. (2013). *Child discipline in a sample of previously incarcerated mothers who participated in a co-residential prison nursery program: A mixed methods study*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3571794).
- Killian, B. (2004). A generation at risk? HIV/AIDS, vulnerable children and security in Southern Africa. In Pharoah, R. (Ed.), *Risk and resilience*. (pp. 33-63). Retrieved from <http://www.issafrica.org/pubs/Monographs/No109/Chap3.htm>.
- King-White, D. L. (2012). *The effects of the children having incarcerated parents succeeding group on delinquent behavior, academic achievement, self-esteem, attendance and aggressive behavior with seventh and eighth grade students who have incarcerated parents or guardians*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3514016).
- Kjellstrand, J. M. (2009). *Children with incarcerated parents: A longitudinal study of the effect of parental incarceration on adolescent externalizing behaviors*. (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3368249).



- Kulkarni, S. J., Kennedy, A. C., & Lewis, C. M. (2010). Using a risk and resilience framework and feminist theory to guide social work interventions with adolescent mother. *Families in Society*, 91(3), 217-224.
- Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, IV, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education*. 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). New directions in multicultural education: Complexities, boundaries and critical race theory. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee-Banks (Eds.). *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) (pp. 50 – 65) New York: Macmillan.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The evolving role of critical race theory in educational scholarship. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 115-9.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). 2006 Presidential Address: From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3 – 12.
- Lazzari, S. R. (2012). *The influence of parental gender on the type of communication between incarcerated parents and their children*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1518891).
- Lee, A. F. & Kreisher, K. (2002, September). Parents in prison. *The ASCA School Counselor*, 40(1), 20 - 23.

- Lee, A. F. (2005, June). Children of inmates: What happens to these unintended victims. *Corrections Today*, 67(3), 84 – 95.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park.
- Loper, A. B. & Tuerk, E. H. (2006). Parenting programs for incarcerated parents: Current research and future directions. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17(4), 407-427.
- Lopez, C. & Bhat, C. S. (2007). Supporting students with incarcerated parents in schools: A group intervention. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 32(2), 139 - 153.
- Luke, K. P. (2002). Mitigating the ill effects of maternal incarceration on women in prison and their children. *Child Welfare*, 81(6), 929 – 948.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Masten, A. S. (2009). Ordinary magic: Lessons from research on resilience in human development. *Education Canada*, 49(3), 28-32.
- McElwain, N. L., Booth-LaForce, C. & Wu, X (2011). Infant-Mother attachment and children's friendship quality. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(5), 1295-1311.
- McGruder, P. H. (1995). *The effect of incarceration rates on mate availability and its effect on the formation and structure of the African American family: A*

- theoretical and empirical analysis*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.
- McIntosh, V. H., Myers, B. J., & Kennon, S. S. (2006). Children of incarcerated Mothers and their caregivers: Factors affecting the quality of their relationship. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 15(5), 581- 596.
- McMillan, B. W. (1990). An ecological perspective on individual human development. *Early Child Development and Care* 55, 33-42.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miller, A. L., Perryman, J., Markovitz, L., Franzen, S., Cochran, S., Brown, S. (2013). Strengthening incarcerated families: Evaluation a pilot program for children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. *Family Relations*, 62, 584-96.
- Ming, M. D. (2011). *The impact of family, community and resilience on African American young adults who had parents incarcerated during childhood*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3465934).
- Moreno, K. L. (2011). *Mother-son connectedness, substance use, and young men's criminal justice system involvement*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3475615).
- Mumola, C. J. (2000, August). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. (NCJ 182335). Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

- Neal, M. F. (2009). *Evaluating the school performance of elementary and middle school children of incarcerated parents*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 339217).
- Newby, G. (2008, December). Addressing the needs of those caring for adolescent children of incarcerated parents. *The Prevention Researcher*, 15, 6 - 9. Retrieved from [www.TPRonline.org](http://www.TPRonline.org).
- Noddings, N. (2007). *Philosophy of Education*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Oseni, R. J. (2005). *Parenting from prison: The experiences of incarcerated African American parents and their families in the state of Louisiana*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3185892).
- Patillo, M., Weiman, D. & Western, B. (2004). *Imprisoning America: The social effects of mass incarceration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Pearson, J. & Davis, L. (2001, December). Serving parents who leave prison: Final report on the work and family center. *Center for policy research*. Denver, Colorado.
- Peltier, M. (2006). Will mommy and daddy ever come home: Children coping with incarcerated parents. Retrieved from <http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/gokids/Legal%20News-Peltier.pdf>.
- Pence, A. R. (Ed.). (1988). *Ecological research with children and families: From concepts to methodology*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Perry, S. (2006). Building charities for a new age. *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 18(23), 18.

- Pew Charitable Trusts (2008). *1 in 100: Behind bars in America 2008*. ([www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)). Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Pew Charitable Trusts (2010). *Collateral costs: Incarceration's effect on economic mobility*. ([www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)). Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Phillips, S. & Bloom B. (1998). In whose best interest? The impact of changing public policy on relatives caring for children with incarcerated parents. *Child Welfare*, 77(5), 531-541.
- Posley, V. (2011). *Children of incarcerated parents: In the children's own words*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3444905).
- Rivard, E. A. (2010). *Hard time and hard love: Issues and challenges of visitation for men of incarcerated women*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 1490936).
- Roettger, M. E. (2006). *Legacies denied: The intergenerational dimension in crime and punishment*. (Master's thesis) Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1432757).
- Rudestam, K. E. & Newton, R. R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sagar, L. J. (2011). *An examination of the needs of children of incarcerated parents*. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3464019).

- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Samuels, G. M. & Pryce, J. M. (2008). "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger": Survivalist self-reliance as resilience and risk among young adults aging out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1198-1210.
- Schirmer, S., Nellis, A. & Mauer, M. (2009). Incarcerated parents and their trends 1991-2007. *The Sentencing Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/index.cfm>.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Shade, K. (2012). *Father identity development among youth involved in the juvenile justice system*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3493699).
- Simmons, C. W. (March 2000). Children of incarcerated parents. *California Research Bureau*, 7(2), 1-11.
- Sisson, W. (2006). Don't forget about the children: Parenting education behind bars. *Corrections Today*, 68(7), 54-57.
- Smith, A., Krisman, K., Strozier, A. L, & Marley, M. A. (2004). Breaking through the bars: Exploring the experiences of addicted incarcerated parents whose children are cared for by relatives. *Families and Children*, 85(2), 187 – 195.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (n.d.). *Children and families of the incarcerated fact sheet*. Retrieved from

[http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/gokids\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/documents/gokids_fact_sheet.pdf).

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (nd). *Offender information search*. Retrieved from <http://offender.tdcj.state.tx.us/OffenderSearch/index.jsp>.

Texas Education Agency (2013). *2013 Texas academic performance report*. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us>.

Texas Education Agency (2014). *EO919 At-risk indicator code*. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/weds/index.html?e0919>.

The White House (2014a). *My brother's keeper: Creating opportunity for boys and young men of color*. ([www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper](http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper)). Washington, DC: The White House President Barack Obama.

The White House (2014b). *Fact sheet: Opportunity for all: President Obama launches my brother's keeper initiative to build ladders of opportunity for boys and young men of color*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/27/fact-sheet-opportunity-all-president-obama-launches-my-brother-s-keeper>.

Tonn, J. L. (2008). Texas governor's education plan boosts pre-K to college funding. *Education Week*, 26(23), 18.

Travis, J. (2005). Families and children. *Federal Probation*, 69, 31 – 42.

- Tsachi, E., Mikulincer, M. & Shaver, P. R. (2011). Attachment insecurities and the processing of threat-related information: Studying the schemas involved in insecure people's coping strategies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(1), 78-93.
- Tuerk, E. H. (2007). *Parenting from the inside: Assessing a curriculum for incarcerated mothers*. (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3288354).
- Unruh, D., Bullis, M. & Yovanoff, P. (2004). Adolescent fathers who are incarcerated juvenile offenders: Explanatory study of the co-occurrence of two problem behaviors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 13, (4), 405-419.
- US Department of Health and Human Services (2002). Indicators of welfare dependence: Annual report to the congress 2002. Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/indicators02/appa-tanf.htm>.
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service (n.d.) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Vol. 77, No. 57 Fed. Reg. 20012-7033 (filed March 22, 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-03-23/pdf/2012-7036.pdf>.



- Vacca, J. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: The invisible children in our schools – What can our schools do to help them?. *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*, 21(1), 49-56.
- Velasquez, M. M., Roughneck Sternberg, K., Mullen, P. D., Carbonari, J. P., and Kan, L. Y. (2007). Psychiatric distress in incarcerated women with recent cocaine and alcohol abuse. *Women's Health Issues*, 17, 264-272.
- Walker, S. P. (2011). *The effects of the incarceration of fathers on the health and wellbeing of mothers and children*. (Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. (UMI No. 3495348).
- Wildeman, C. J. (2009). Parental imprisonment, the prison boom, and the concentration of the childhood disadvantage. *Demography*, 46(2), 265-80. doi: 10.1353/dem.0.0052
- Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Working with children with parents in prison. (2002, January). *Children's Services Practice Notes*, 7, 1.
- Yates, T. M. & Grey, I. K. (2012). Adapting to aging out: Profiles of risk and resilience among emancipated foster youth. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24, 475-492.

## **APPENDIX A**

### Interview Questions

- (1) Demographic information
  - a. Age
  - b. Sex
  - c. Ethnicity (self-identify)
  - d. Grade in school
  - e. Number of siblings and their ages
- (2) Who is the incarcerated family member?
- (3) How long have they been incarcerated?
- (4) Who is your current caretaker?
- (5) Describe your schooling experience since your parent's incarceration.
- (6) Tell me about a typical school day.
- (7) In general, do your teachers know about your incarcerated family member?
- (8) In your school setting, has the incarceration impacted your
  - a. Learning
    - i. Grades
    - ii. Core Subjects or Electives
  - b. Peer group?
  - c. Relationships with teachers?
  - d. Relationships with principals?

- e. Relationships with counselors?
  - f. Participation in extra-curricular activities?
- (9) How has life changed since your parent has been incarcerated?
  - (10) What was life like before (the incarceration)?
  - (11) Describe any experiences in school that you think are related to the incarceration of your parent.
  - (12) How has the incarceration of your parent affected your schooling experiences?
  - (13) Tell me what it is like to be a high school student whose parent is incarcerated.
  - (14) What would you like for your teachers to know about children, like yourself, whose parents are incarcerated?
  - (15) What are your future plans after high school?
  - (16) Have those plans changed since your parent(s) incarceration, if so how? If not, why not?

The researcher may interview the caregiver if available. Possible questions for the caregiver are:

- (1) Does the school know about your child's (or relationship to caregiver) incarcerated family member?
- (2) How long have they been incarcerated?
- (3) What was the reason for incarceration?

(4) What, if anything, would you want teachers and/or school administrators to do to help your student?

# APPENDIX B

B. Impact of incarceration on school	C. Life changed upon incarceration of parent	D. Life changes to know	E. Parents	F. School experiences related to CPE	G. School Experiences	H. Teachers know	I. Typical school day
When I was in first grade, they would call my dad. He had a way better way to talk to me. He didn't try to hurt me. Bryan always wanted me to fight. He would say if you don't fight them then I'm going to fight you. One day on the bus another boy spit on the floor and put my bag in it. I didn't do anything. The kids in the apartment complex where I lived were told by Bryan that if someone hits Ray and he doesn't hit back, I'll give you \$5 to whoever told him. When we got off the bus, now it's different at first I wasn't focused in school. My daddy wasn't there. So now you're used to it.	He's been in there since about 6 years. In and out for "cheating" when folk out of their money. I hope that he'll get out before Christmas. When we visited last he said that the judge said that he had to do six years. And it's been six years. I never really had a relationship with my dad. Before this year, I hadn't talked to him since I was 7. We moved to Beaumont then and Bryan said that he was my dad, but I knew better. My name is Ray Anthony Jackson Jr. and his name is Jackson Jr. and his name is Jackson Jr.	I don't want anyone to yell at me for no reason. And not being able to drop a topic. Like when we went to church recently, I was outside the building 20 minutes before I walked down. I walked off, but my grandmother was still talking about it. "I'm not going to feed you and you continue to disrespect me." She couldn't drop it. If I'm going to the mad, I'm going to be mad. She used to be a police officer. She can't tell me I'm my face. I have good reflexes, so she can't tell me. I don't want them to be sniffer, don't trust them any different, try to talk to them if they're not focused.	Sisters 11, 10, 8, and 9. The 11 year old is from my dad. I just met her this year. The others are from my mom. One was a twin, but the other twin died. When I got in touch with my grandmother I found out I had another sister.	When I was in first grade, they would call me dad. He had a way better way to talk to me. He didn't try to hurt me. Bryan always wanted me to fight. He would say if you don't fight them then I'm going to fight you. One day on the bus another boy spit on the floor and put my bag in it. I didn't do anything. The kids in the apartment complex where I lived were told by Bryan that if someone hits Ray and he doesn't hit back, I'll give you \$5 to whoever told him. When we got off the bus, if ever you have both parents you're more focused in school. You're happy at home, you're happy at school.	When I was in first grade, they would call me dad. He had a way better way to talk to me. He didn't try to hurt me. Bryan always wanted me to fight. He would say if you don't fight them then I'm going to fight you. One day on the bus another boy spit on the floor and put my bag in it. I didn't do anything. The kids in the apartment complex where I lived were told by Bryan that if someone hits Ray and he doesn't hit back, I'll give you \$5 to whoever told him. When we got off the bus, I wasn't focused on school. It was hard on every class. Why my real daddy left my step daddy was around since I was 7, got really close and then he left so why does this keep happening.	Two teachers - Algebra and Chemistry	I get my alarm clock for 5:20am, and then I sleep for about 10 minutes. My grandma wakes me up at 6 and tells me the bus is coming. I sleep in my game shorts and I get up and wear them to school. Dad calls about 3 times a week. My grandmother told him and he says he's fine with it. I don't eat breakfast. I think I've eaten breakfast at school about 20 times this school year. The bus is usually quiet in the morning. I go to theater tech, which is more theater than tech. I come to school go home. Get up at 5:30am eat breakfast catch bus at 6:18 am 6:30. School I don't know. If someone brings up their dad, it bothers me.

## APPENDIX C

### TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: The Voices of Six African American Children of Incarcerated Parents

**You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by AlTricia Larke McCowan, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you and your child decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to allow your child to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign this permission form. If you decide you do not want your child to participate, there will be no penalty to you or your child. Your child will not lose any benefits they normally would have at school if you choose for him/her not to participate.**

#### **Why Is This Study Being Done?**

The purpose of this study is to hear the voices of African American children whose parent(s) are incarcerated. As a result of a series of interviews or focus groups they would be asked to share their perceptions of their education and how their teachers, counselors, and/or administrators could better facilitate their learning in classrooms. The focus of the research will be on their thoughts about their education. Their feelings about their parent's incarceration may be explored as well.

#### **Why is My Child Being Asked to Be in This Study?**

Your child is being asked to be in this study because he/she is an African American high school student who has a parent who is incarcerated.

#### **How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?**

Ten people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, the goal is to have six people invited to participate in the study.

#### **What Are the Alternatives to Being in This Study?**

The alternative is to not participate in the study.

#### **What Will My Child Be Asked To Do In This Study?**

Your child will be asked to answer interview questions pertaining to their parent's incarceration and their education. Their participation in this study will last up to five hours and includes a minimum of two visits. In addition, they will be asked to keep a journal of their thoughts while the study is taking place.

#### **Visit 1**

This visit will last at least one hour. During this visit preliminary questions will be asked as it relates to parental incarceration and educational experiences. Students will be given a journal to keep track of any thoughts they may have after the conclusion of the first interview.

#### **Visit 2**

This visit will last at least one hour. During this visit your child will be able look over the transcript from the first visit. They will have the opportunity to correct any mistakes or clear up any information from the previous interview. They will also be able to add any additional information they may have forgotten or wanted to add during the first interview. The researcher

Version Date:

Page 1 of 4

 IRB NUMBER: IRB2013-0268  
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/03/2013  
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 05/31/2014

# Code Book

Missing my parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't hear him at my games anymore"</li> <li>• Things went downhill...we were homeless</li> <li>• No one at home when I get there</li> </ul>
Who knows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only one of my friends know</li> <li>• None of my teachers know</li> </ul>
Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My stepfather abused me</li> <li>• We were homeless</li> </ul>
Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I get angry</li> <li>• I'm sad</li> <li>• I hate my mom</li> </ul>
Constant mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were living in the car</li> <li>• Moved with my grandmother, then my uncle, now staying with my sister</li> <li>• Moved with my mother &amp; stepfather, now paternal grandparents, going back to live with mom</li> </ul>
School day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I try not to think about it"</li> <li>• I try not to think about my mom</li> <li>• Long – from 6am to 7pm</li> </ul>